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On the Cover:

Sony Animation's *Open Season* is one of the first cool new animated releases of early fall.

MIPCOM JUNIOR Cover: Buena Vista International's hot new fall offerings. © 2006 Breakthrough Animation, Heroic Film Company, Atomic Cartoons and PASI Animation.

CARTOON FORUM Cover: Studio Baestarts' new series *Roy*.



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Double Vision: Thanks to the efforts of the folks at Sony Animation, we were able to offer two different collectible covers featuring *Open Season* this month. Visit www.animationmagazine.net to find out how you can get both versions of our October magazine.





As the big summer of CG-animated feature toons draws to a close, nervous studio executives are closely examining the box-office numbers in search of hidden trends and warning signs. To make life easier for everybody, we thought it would be a good idea to look at the commercial and critical success of the year's animated movies to date

We still don't understand why everybody feels the need to complain about too many animated projects clogging the theatrical pipelines. Nobody ever worries about too many dramas or comedies in the studio slates—why should there be a double standard for animation? (By the way, we got the films' critical ratings from the folks at www.rottentomatoes.com who compile the percentages by looking at the movies' reviews in major newspapers and magazines around the country. In case you were wondering, only a movie that is loved by every critic in the country gets a 100%—and we know how often that happens!!)



PIXAR ANIMATION STUDIOS

Ranking	Studio	Domestic B.O. in Millions	Critical Rating
1.	Cars (Disney)	\$240.6	76%
2.	Ice Age: The Meltdown (Fox)	\$194.3	58%
3.	Over the Hedge (DreamWorks)	\$154.8	74%
4.	Monster House (Sony)	\$69.4	72%
5.	Curious George (Universal)	\$58.3	69%
6.	Barnyard (Paramount)	\$54.9	23%
7.	The Wild (Disney)	\$36.3	19%
8.	The Ant Bully (Warner Bros.)	\$25.8	69%
9.	Doogal (Weinstein)	\$7.6	5%
10.	A Scanner Darkly (Warner Indie)	\$5.3	64%

* Sources: the-numbers.com, imdb.com, rottentomatoes.com

Date: 8/22/06

In September, all eyes will be on Sony Animation's *Open Season* (the subject of this month's colorful cover story), Fox/IDT's *Everyone's Hero* and Miramax's *Renaissance*. Then in the final quarter of 2006, DreamWorks/Aardman's *Flushed Away*, Warner Bros. *Happy Feet* and Paramount's *Charlotte's Web* will draw us to the big screen. If nothing else, all of these great contenders will give us an interesting Oscar season race!

Ramin

Ramin Zahed
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Quote of the Month

"Doing animation is the equivalent of pushing a golf ball with your nose across the country ... Being an animator is somewhere between being an artist and a dentist!"

—Animator Andy London (*The Back Brace*) in a *New York Times* article about the city's indie animation salons.



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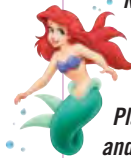
The Animation Planner

October

FRAME-BY-FRAME

2-6 It's time to get your game on at the **2006 London Games Festival** (www.cmpgame.com).

3 Nothing says fall is here better than the onslaught of new animated DVDs on the market. Today's batch of goodies includes **Cartoon Network: Christmas Vol. 3**, **HarveyToons: The Complete Collection**, **The Little Mermaid: Platinum Edition** and **Tom and Jerry Tales Vol. 1**.



4 Are you ready for the madness and blood-letting of **The Texas Chainsaw Massacre: The Beginning?**



5-8 When in Rome, you check out the **Romics International Comics and Cartoon Festival** (www.romics.it).



6-8 Wouldn't you want to be in Rio de Janeiro, taking in the glorious sights of the Brazilian **International Festival of Erotic Animation** (<http://br.geocities.com/fiae2006/index.html>)?



7-13 TV movers and shakers will be hanging out at the Palais des Festivals in Cannes, France, for the annual **MIPCOM Junior** and **MIPCOM** markets (www.mipcom.com).



10 Your one-stop shopping at the DVD stores today will get you **Ed, Edd 'n Eddy: Complete First Season**, **Fox and the Hound: 25th Anniversary Edition** and **Harvey Birdman Attorney at Law Vol. 2**.



13 If you're a horror aficionado, then you'll be lining up to Takashi Shimizu's **The Grudge 2**, with Sarah Michelle Gellar and Jennifer Beals. (Was *Flashdance* really 23 years ago?)

13-15 Members of the Mexican gaming and animation industry get together at **CREANIMAX** in Guadalajara, Jalisco (www.creanimax.com).

17 Two big Nickelodeon box sets arrive on DVD today: **Nick Jr. Favorites** and **Nick Picks**. You can also pick up **Over the Hedge** and **Wonder Showzen—Season 2** in stores.



19-29 You are bound to find some cool animated projects at the **Chicago International Children's Film Festival**, which is dubbed "Cannes for Kids" (www.cicff.org).



20 Disney re-releases **Tim Burton's The Nightmare Before Christmas** in 3D in select theaters today.



21 Brad Bird, Andrew Stanton, Gary Rydstrom and Lee Unkrich are some of the speakers at the **Pixar Storytelling** seminar and workshop in Los Angeles (www.screenwritingexpo.com).



23-26 Adobe Systems hosts the **Adobe MAX 2006** Conference targeting game developers and designers in Las Vegas (www.adobe.com/events/max).



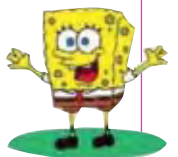
24 Holy home entertainment galore, **Batman Beyond: Season 2** is out on DVD! Also out today are **Justice League Unlimited: Season One**, **Krypto The Superdog Vol. 2** and **The Best of Saturday TV Funhouse**.



26-28 The German town of Potsdam hosts the **Cartoon Masters: Cartoon Creativity** event (www.cartoon-media.be)

27-29 With Halloween around the corner, it's a good time to check out **Toronto's Fantasy Worldwide Film Festival**, which features a special animation category (www.fantasyworldwide.com).

31 What would be a toon DVD collection be without **Jakers! Sheep on the Loose** and **SpongeBob SquarePants: Whale of a Birthday**, which are both in stores today?

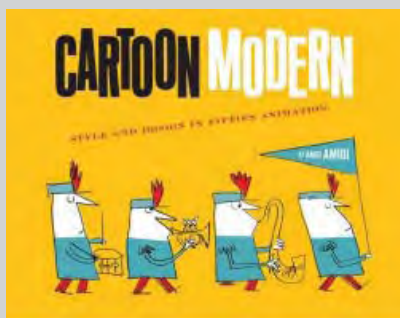


To get your company's events and products listed in this monthly calendar, please e-mail cwebb@animationmagazine.net

BOOKS WE LOVE

Cartoon Modern By Amid Amidi [Chronicle Books, \$40]

It's ironic that in 2006, a year in which we seem to be bombarded with mediocre CG animation in theaters, there seems to be revival of books about retro 2D toons and classic designs. This month, we are blessed with a fantastic volume on the inspired animated shorts, ads, films and TV series that came out during the '50s. The eye-popping creations of toon visionaries such as Ward Kimball, John Hubley, Tom Oreb, Walt Peregoy, Sterling Sturtevant and many others are examined in a book that is as rich in visuals as it is in interviews and insights. You'll find rare art accompanied by discussions from Han-



na-Barbera's Yogi Bear and Quick Draw McGraw to Gene Deitch's Tom Terrific and Sydney to the period's influential ads, as well as the Mouse House classics such as *Sleeping Beauty*, *Alice in Wonderland*, *101 Dalmatians* and *Peter Pan*. As *Foster's Home for Imaginary Friends* creator Craig McCracken points out on the cover notes, the book is impressive "because it goes beyond the studios and really focuses on the fact that these cartoons are all made by unique and individual artists." Ah yes, this handsome coffee-table gem is the perfect antidote to some of the crass commercial travesties we've seen in recent times!

Drawing the Line: The Untold Story of the Animation Unions from Bosko to Bart Simpson By Tom Sito [University Press of Kentucky, \$32]



Ace animator and former Hollywood Animation Guild president Tom Sito (*The Lion King*, *Shrek*) is our knowledgeable guide in this colorful journey through the birth and evolution of artists unions in toon town. You can get the real skinny on how the Screen Cartoonists Union fought for the rights of artists in a medium that wasn't exactly embracing labor initiatives in the 20th century. Legendary figures like Walt Disney, Chuck Jones and Max Fleischer show up in these anecdote-filled pages, which help readers get a clear understanding of many historic events (from strikes and walk-outs to blacklists and long wage negotiation battles). As we embark on a new era where artists can express themselves via new platforms, it's essential to learn about how animators banded together to earn their rightful place on the totem pole in the past decades. And Sito is just the right man to give us this perspective. ■



FRAME-BY-FRAME



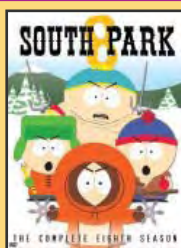
Small Is Beautiful



Since fall is officially considered the kick-off of festival and “important Oscar-worthy” season, the folks at Apple’s **iTunes** Music Store are keeping with tradition and releasing ten acclaimed animated shorts available for purchase on www.itunes.com. Released by **Shorts International**, the programming and distribution arm of short films specialist Brit Shorts, the selection includes John Canemaker’s Academy Award-winning *The Moon and the Son: An Imagined Conversation*, Oscar nominees *The Mysterious Geographic Explorations of Jasper Morello* from Anthony Lucas and *Badgered* from Sharon Colman, as well as Bill Plympton’s 2005 Annie Award winner, *The Fan and the Flower*. The download list also includes Josh Staub’s festival favorite *The Mantis Parable*. The length of these noteworthy projects make them ideal for iPods ... and if you work in animation, maybe you can call it research and get your boss to pay for them!

Hot Discs

The following animated DVDs are doing brisk business on amazon.com this month:



1. South Park: The Complete Eighth Season (Paramount)
2. Cars: Widescreen Edition (Disney)
3. The Tick Vs. Season One (Disney)
4. The Simpsons: The Complete Eighth Season (Fox)
5. Brother Bear 2 (Disney)
6. The Little Mermaid: Special Edition (Disney)
7. Ice Age: The Meltdown (Fox)
8. Schoolhouse Rock: Special 30th Edition (Disney)
9. Over the Hedge (DreamWorks)
10. Pinky and the Brain, Vol. 1 (Warner Bros.)



Source: amazon.com 8/22/06

Building an Italian Toon Town

After taking the customary time off for their summer vacazione, the creative folks at Italy’s **Gruppo Alconi** are fighting off the competition with two new projects presented at Cartoon Forum and MIPCOM Junior. The first, **Lello & Lella** is a brainchild of the studio’s founders Sergio and Francesco Manfio. The clever 26 x 10 toon centers on two offbeat animated characters who find themselves on crazy missions in the real-life worlds



of wildlife. Blending animation and live-action footage of animals in their natural habitat, the show promises to be a fun way of teaching kids about the wonders of the natural world.

The Manfio brothers have also prepared a third season of their traditionally animated series, **Pet Pals: The Band**, which explores the friendly adventures of a group of animals.

“The relationship between the characters in *Pet Pals* is based on understanding and friendship,” explains Francesco Manfio. “The animation is brought to life by Giorgio Cavazzano, Italy’s foremost Disney-school cartoonist. The show has an appealing style that makes it perfect for the whole family. In addition, the fairy tales and folk tales we explore in the series are essential for child development. Kids from around the world can discover that they have many cultural references points in common with each other.” ■

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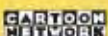


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Grim Adventures for Halloween

Fall brings creepy new games for boys and ghouls. **by Ryan Ball**

It's no secret that horror is bigger than ever. As fright flicks rake in the bucks severed hand over bloody fist, people are also turning to their game consoles for thrills and chills of the supernatural kind. Fans of George A. Romero movies are already getting into the Halloween spirit by trying to survive a zombie apocalypse in CAPCOM's popular *Dead Rising* for Xbox 360, but there are less violent alternatives for the younger set that will surely make fans of older gamers as well:

Monster House

In Sony's hit animated feature, *Monster House*, a trio of kids eventually gather up the nerve to venture into that one spooky house that exists in their neighborhood. Released in conjunction with the movie, the game from THQ takes players deeper into the atrocious abode, introducing new floors and various nooks and crannies harboring horrors tailor-made for kids ages 10 and up.



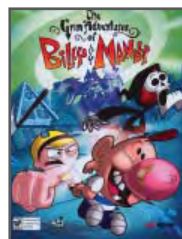
Unlike the film, which was made using Sony Pictures Imageworks' patented Performance Capture technique, the game was all key-frame animated in Maya with proprietary tools allowing the crew to copy animation and skin weights for sharing over various characters. "We had to stick to the movie's realistic style," says game director Basil Lanaris of developer A2M. "On top of that, there were additional requirements, as the movie's director [Gil

Kenan] wanted the 'attacking creatures' in this game to be physical extensions of the *Monster House*—chairs, pipes, etc.—and not anthropomorphic or self-aware living creatures. Because all of these objects are typically inanimate, we had to rely on our creative animations to give life to all of the creatures in the game."

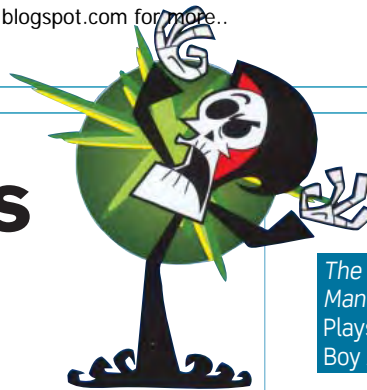
See what frightful fun awaits in *Monster House*, now available for PlayStation 2, GameCube and Nintendo DS.

The Grim Adventures of Billy & Mandy

Devotees of the Cartoon Network series *The Grim Adventures of Billy & Mandy* can get in on the fun with the new game from Cartoon Network Interactive and Midway. For the first time, console players can enter the unique world of siblings Billy and Mandy, who pal around with the Grim Reaper. One to two players can seek out unlockable rewards in mission mode, while battle mode allows up to four players to brawl in destructible environments.



Maxwell Atoms, creator of the series, worked closely with the development team to make sure the fun of the show translated to the gamespace. The game's producer, Nico Bihary, tells us Atoms spent countless hours creating a wide variety of original art for loading screens, unlockable treats and other areas of the game. "It's a real motivator for the team when you see the creator of the show giving the game as much attention as Maxwell has," he says. "Eventually, at the end of the day, the game benefits from having so many parents." Bihary also notes that Atoms wrote an original script for the game and

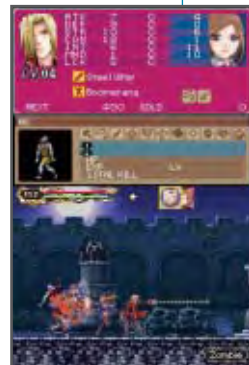


even directed the show's voice cast, ad-libbing jokes the whole time.

The Grim Adventures of Billy and Mandy will be available on Oct. 2 for Playstation 2, GameCube and Game Boy Advance.

Castlevania: Portrait of Ruin

A 20-year-old arcade favorite gets some new blood with *Castlevania: Portrait of Ruin* from Konami. The franchise's second Nintendo DS title casts players in the roles of vampire hunters Jonathan Morris and Charlotte Orlean as they try to stop two mysterious sisters from resurrecting Dracula amid the chaos of World War II. More than 100 diverse enemies and new environments await in this return visit to the original monster house.



"Two of the core aspects of the series that we wanted to preserve in *Portrait of Ruin* were exploration and fast-paced action," says Dennis Lee, group manager for the development team at Konami. "For this game, we are expanding the exploration element, letting gamers get out of Dracula's Castle to journey through some very diverse areas such as the desert and a war-torn town. The game's core action remains intact, but we have also added a second playable character for additional strategy and variety. Players can pick a character that fits their play style and even have them on screen together for twice the action."

Lee tells us that the game primarily uses hand-drawn sprites to bring the characters and environments to life. "This allows for movements that show the maximum amount of personality, such as Jonathan flipping his hair defiantly before a big attack and Charlotte making an incantation before casting a spell," he comments. "The *Castlevania* series has always been known for its excellent animation and this world-class pedigree is very apparent when playing *Portrait of Ruin*. ■

Castlevania: Portrait of Ruin will be available exclusively for the Nintendo DS in November.

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Let the Fur Fly!

Memorable characters and an elastic cartoony style make Sony Pictures Animation's *Open Season* a sight for sore eyes. **by Thomas J. McLean**

Everything old is new again in *Open Season*, the debut CG-animated film from the folks at Sony Pictures Animation.

The film, opening Sept. 29, uses cutting-edge computer animation to tell the story of Boog, a pampered, town-raised 900-pound grizzly bear (voiced by Martin Lawrence) who meets Elliot, a fast talking mule deer played by Ashton Kutcher, and discovers the joys and the dangers of life in the wild. The technical challenge of creating so much fur and a natural forest setting is obvious, but the filmmakers wanted to go one step further and bring some old-school zip for the first time to computer animation.

"We had in mind to do a more car-

toony style of animation, more a Looney Tunes 'squash and stretch,' says Jill Culton, a Pixar alumna who directed the project along with Disney veteran Roger Allers (*The Lion King*) and vfx master Anthony Stacchi (*The Rocketeer*, *Hook*). "We wanted to give the animators the opportunity to create really strong poses and silhouettes, which is difficult to do in traditional computer animation," she says.

The starting point for that strong graphic style was the work of Eyvind Earle, a famous

illustrator who painted backgrounds in the 1950s for such classic Disney films as *Sleeping Beauty*. They turned to another renowned illustrator, Carter Goodrich, to design the film's characters.

Executing the style required the creation of new tools, most significantly a tool called Shapers that allows animators to stretch and sculpt characters. Animation supervisor Sean Mullen says the Shapers were built into the models. An arm, for example, would have eight or so square slices going up





Triple Play: The film's directors—from left, Anthony Stacchi, Jill Culton and Roger Allers—encouraged the animators to opt for a more cartoony style of CG, based on the graphic illustrations of Eyvind Earle and Carter Goodrich.



the arm that the animator could turn on or off and move around. "You could use it to get a slight bend to the arm, so it's slightly bowed, or so you could get a smear, like you would with traditional animation," he says.

That enabled the film's crew of about 60 animators to create the look Culton, Allers and Stacchi were going for. "If you slow frame through good traditional animation, you can see where poses go farther—they stretch farther than you can physically—and snap back," Culton says. "The whole trick is to be able to not detect that stretch. It happens so quickly, so subliminally that it just enhances the animation and gives you more snappy

the tools allowed them to do things that were new to CG but not to animation. One example is a scene in which they grafted extra arms onto Elliot for a shot in which he quickly looks through Boog's belongings. "It's something we haven't been able to do with CG before because you were limited to your two-armed model."

The new tools also gave a boost to animators' creativity and productivity. "Having all these tools allowed us just to do more," Mullen says. "All the animators seemed to be having more fun on this show than the others and we got some really fresh performances out of it."

The film's creative genesis began

John Carls. Moore says Carls assembled about 400 hunting-themed panels from the cartoon and presented it to him at lunch in 2002 with the title "Open Season" scrawled on the front. "He said I think you have a movie here," Moore says.

Working then as a journalist at the *Los Angeles Times*, Moore looked at reports of animals that come into mountain towns and get along just fine until they break something and are sent back to the wilderness. "I immediately spotted this hole in the story, which was you never knew what happens to them after they get moved to the wilderness," he says. Moore pegged the story to a classic odd-couple concept and Sony Pictures Animation scooped the pitch up almost at first sight, which at that point was in the early stages of startup.

Working on a studio's first film attracted a lot of talent, starting with Allers, Culton and Stacchi, each of whom "captained" one-third of the film. Allers says the studio has been great to work with and allows each film to have its own look instead of

The filmmakers opted to stay away from pop-culture references, which director Roger Allers say would just date the film and make watching it in a few years like "reading the newspapers."

timing."

Allers, who directed *The Lion King* during a long career at Disney, says

with Steve Moore, creator of the single-panel newspaper cartoon *In the Bleachers*, and his producing partner



FEATURE

creating and enforcing a house style.

Culton admits the project was good enough to lure her from the Northern California turkey range where she was living. "Tony Stacchi and I had always talked about doing a buddy movie where there's not a straight guy and a sidekick but two sidekicks stuck together. And Martin Lawrence and Ashton Kutcher are just perfect for that," she says. "The other thing it had was that great concept that Steve came up with, which was really every fall hunters invade the forest but, this fall, the animals are fighting back."

The new style was a challenge for animators who had only worked on computers, Mullen says. "They were suddenly dealing with art principles they never had to deal with on all-CG films," he says. "Suddenly we were doing all this sculpting and you could really change the shape of characters, so you had to watch keeping it on model."

The approach also affected the performances. "To get the strong graphic shapes, we really clearly needed to hit strong poses for the performances. So it was much more of a pose-to-pose approach," Mullen says.

The studio benefited from the vi-

sual-effects expertise of its sister company, Sony Imageworks, which animated the film. "When we came to them with different challenges they didn't really bat an eye as they're used to doing completely different looks for every live-action film that comes in," Culton says. "The question was could they bring story and talented character animators together as well, and I think again the studio really rose to that challenge."



One area the filmmakers decided to stay away from was the pop-culture

references, which Allers says would just date the film and make watching it in a few years like "reading yesterday's newspaper."

The making of the film was quick for an animated feature, taking about three years to make and one year to animate, Allers says.

In the end, as the number of computer-animated features reaches a high this year, it will be the story that determines which films will stand out and Culton believes *Open Season* has a lot of heart.

"It's kind of a journey that everyone takes in growing up where sometimes you have to leave your home in order to find your authentic place in the world," Culton says. "And (Boog) has to make that choice and the choice is difficult."

"It's about growing up," Allers adds. In many ways, just like computer animation itself. ■

Sony Pictures Animation's *Open Season* lets the animals loose in theaters on September 29. Opening also in IMAX theaters September 29.

Thomas J. Mclean is a Los Angeles-based journalist who specializes in animation, comic books and visual effects.

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Frank Gladstone

tion, having worked on *Space Jam* for Warner Bros. and *Shrek* at DreamWorks. For *Everyone's Hero*, he had the task of keeping the story focused on the direction set by Christopher and Dana

Reeve. "One of the things that appealed to Chris and Dana so much," says Tippe, "was that this is a story of a little boy who is willing to go to the ends of the earth to help his father. What Chris loved about this was that it's a father-son story, and it's a direct reflection of Chris's relationship with his three children. It was my job to stay on point and stay true to that vision."

Throughout the making of the film, Kurtz would visit Reeve's home several times a week as they shaped the story. "He came to be a friend that I really loved. He had

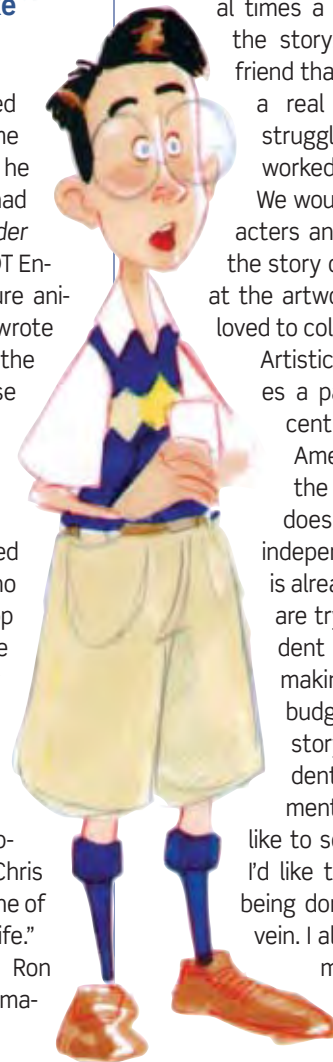
a real work ethic—he was struggling to breathe, but we worked four, five hours a day.

We would talk about the characters and ideas for how to lay the story out, and we would look at the artwork together. He really loved to collaborate."

Artistically, the film showcases a painterly style, reminiscent of Norman Rockwell's Americana. Nonetheless, the overall feel of the film does have the stamp of an independent studio. "The film

is already unique because we are trying a sort of independent filmmaker's way of making a movie, with a lower budget but with a great story," says IDT's vice president of artistic development Frank Gladstone. "I'd

like to see it succeed because I'd like to see more animation being done in this independent vein. I already know it's a good movie, but I hope it works because it'll



IDT Hits One Out of the Park

The resilient spirits of Christopher and Dana Reeve inspire the studio's first CG-animated feature, *Everyone's Hero*. by Jake Friedman

The spirited first feature enterprise from IDT Entertainment, *Everyone's Hero*, has a special secret weapon that may become the envy of many of this year's animated movies. While it compares to other adventure films in which a character goes on a journey of personal growth (accompanied by sarcastic sidekicks), this new release holds the unique distinction of being co-directed, with Daniel St. Pierre and Colin Brady, by the late Christopher Reeve. The much-loved actor and his wife, Dana, who passed away last March from lung cancer, served as exec producers on *Hero*. The couple's influence is clearly felt as an emotional core about resilience in the face of adversity and the power of the positive spirit.

The movie, which takes place in 1932 New York, is about Yankee Irving, a 10-year-old boy who wishes more than anything to play baseball like his heroes in the New York Yankees. Unintentionally, Yankee causes his father to get fired from his job when Babe Ruth's lucky bat is stolen, and our hero takes it upon himself to travel to Chicago and return the bat to the Babe himself.

The storyline originated when IDT

founder Howard Jonas approached writer Rob Kurtz with a bedtime story about Yankee Irving which he told his children at night. Kurtz had been a sitcom writer (*Grace Under Fire*, *Cosby*) and was tapped by IDT Entertainment as a writer for future animated television projects. He wrote the *Everyone's Hero* script with the intent of taking only a brief pause from television, which turned into almost two years.

"Howard Jonas liked the script a lot and gave it to Chris Reeve," says Kurtz. "Chris really responded to the story about a little boy who just doesn't quit and doesn't stop swinging. When he first told me how much he liked it, I was deeply touched, and then on the next pass, he asked if I'd like to work with him on it. Writers on original drafts don't always get that opportunity. And to get that opportunity with someone like Chris was a tremendous experience—one of the greatest experiences of my life."

The film's creative producer Ron Tippe is a veteran of feature anima-

help open up our industry to more types of pictures that don't have to be gag-oriented laugh riots. They can be pictures with heart."

"I hope that as we go forward, a hallmark of our style will be diversity," says exec producer Jerry Davis. "Costs are going down, in terms of hardware and productivity of off-the-shelf software, and also by virtue of production discipline. So there are opportunities to take bigger risks with animated movies and not be restricted to tried and true formulas. We're also building a studio that is very filmmaker-driven. Having really strong points of view among our directors will make each of our movies very unique. And if we allow filmmakers to take their first instinct and go with it, we can make movies for less money and still be successful."

Davis had come from supervising production at Blue Sky for seven years, and before that he worked at Warner Bros. "I worked on *Iron Giant*," he adds, "and I feel that *Everyone's Hero* has a lot of the heart and tone that *Iron Giant* has."

Almost 400 people worked on the film in total between the offices in Newark and the studios in Burbank, Toronto and Israel. The animation was done in Maya with Photoshop art. Rendering was done with Mental Ray, while Avid was used for editing. The total cost is reportedly far less than the usual \$100 million price tag of most CG films. Altogether, the film took less than two years to make, and about a year for production alone. "It wasn't simply because we wanted to rush the film," assures Glad-

stone. "It's because we have a different view of how these films could be made. We were very conscious about moving this movie through and sticking with our decisions. Because of this, we were able to make the movie very efficiently, still make it look great and tell a good story."

One of the biggest challenges of the production was the loss of the film's visionary. After Christopher Reeve's passing, the production took about six weeks to regroup. "When he passed away," says Kurtz, "it was very, very hard. But Chris wasn't a quitter, and I had to remind myself of that a lot. I found myself missing him, and even talking to him during story meetings. For a long time Dana was our bridge to Chris, and then when we lost her too, our bridge was the movie itself."

"All of a sudden people turn to you and you'd say to yourself, 'I have to make sure we do what Chris would have wanted,'" says Tippe. "I took my responsibility extremely seriously, and I'm so proud of the work that we made. If Chris and Dana were



here now, and I believe they are in some fashion or form, they would be overjoyed. Chris' whole thing was 'keep on swinging.' There's nothing you can't do if you put your mind to it. Go forward; don't let anything get in your way. That's a tremendous thing to exult, and that's why I think people will love the film." ■

Fox releases IDT Entertainment's *Everyone's Hero* in theaters on September 15.



The Samurai Critic:

Reviews of the latest anime releases on DVD



Illustration by Pres Romanillos

by Charles Solomon

Japanese heroines enjoy a wider range of roles than their U.S. counterparts. Disney's Lilo was wonderfully vulnerable and outré, but she's an exception. Haven't we had enough snide clones of *Rugrats*' Angelica?

Like the popular *Azumanga Daioh*, **Piano** (2002) is an example of the *anime verité* style: small-scaled, realistic stories created for young female viewers. Miu Nomura is a shy, talented eighth-grader whose life centers on her piano lessons. But Miu isn't a little girl anymore; she's discovering there's more to life than arpeggios. She shares special moments with her best friend, Yuuki, and when Yuuki and a member of track team begin a puppy love romance, they introduce Miu to KazuyTakahashi, a cute boy who's the school's star runner.

Miu faces her first real crisis when her remote, demanding music teacher insists that she perform a composition of her own at the school's big spring recital. Although she's initially terrified at the prospect, Miu begins to find her voice as an individual and a musician: the song she writes and the spirit with which she performs it reflect her appreciation for her family's love, Yuuki's friendship and Takahashi's shy affection. Although Miu is diffident and insecure, she's never priggish or saccharine. Gentle and unaffected, *Piano* is a warmly reassuring series for girls.

After the animated series based her manga *Urusei Yatsura* ("Those Obnoxious Aliens") scored a big hit in 1981, Rumiko Takahashi followed it with **Maison Ikkoku** (1986), a romantic farce inspired by a tacky apartment building she once lived near. Yusaku Godai has finally gotten into college, hoping to fulfill his dream of becoming a preschool teacher. He gets a room at Maison Ikkoku, a ramshackle boarding house and is immediately smitten with lovely widow Kyoko Otonashi, who manages the building for her late husband's parents. The other tenants are an odd lot,



to say the least: Mr. Yotsuya snoops and never seems to work; Akemi, the red-haired waitress, lolls around in scanty lingerie; Mrs. Ichinose, who shares a room with her son Kentaro, is such a gossip she qualifies as one of the mass media. All of the tenants love to drink—and embarrass poor Godai, whose maladroitness to life afford them plenty of opportunities.

The series ran for 96 episodes, most of which consist of one romantic misunderstanding getting resolved just in time for another one to arise. The course of true love never runs smoothly, but at Maison Ikkoku, that course has more potholes than an L.A. street. Amid the endless crises, disasters and blown chances, it becomes clear that Godai has a genuinely kind heart and a talent for taking care of children.

After many hours of romantic farce, Godai becomes a certified teacher—and finally works up the nerve to propose to Kyoko. In one of the last episodes, Godai visits the grave of Soichiro, Kyoko's first husband. He recognizes Kyoko's memories of their marriage will always be a part of the woman he loves; he accepts that and has no wish to make Kyoko forget her former happiness. But he hopes Soichiro's spirit will bless their union and allow his wife to be happy again, in a different way with a different man. Kyoko overhears Godai's prayer and realizes she's chosen wisely. It's an extraordinarily sensitive piece of writing, moving yet free of bathos, and few American animated films can match its emotional impact.

If *Piano* and *Maison Ikkoku* deal with real emotions, the featherweight comedy **Doki Doki School Hours**



offers unadulterated silliness.

As she stands 4'10" and has the face of an adorable child, no one takes Okitsu High School teacher Mika Sensei seriously. To make matters worse, she's still unmarried at 27 and lives at home. (In Japan, a single woman of 25 or over is often referred to as "Christmas Cake," i.e., a leftover.) The girls in her class, especially Kitagawa treat her like a cunning younger sister, although Tominaga adores slasher movies and Kobayashi worships designer labels. The boys are an even less edifying lot: Watabe wants to be a manga artist and draws constantly; although Seki is heterosexual, he dresses in flamboyant drag; Kudou, the top student in the class, dotes on cheerfully dim jock, Suetake. The arrival of American exchange student and self-described *otaku* Anthony does little to raise the group's collective I.Q.

Most of the episodes depict the regular events of a Japanese high school year: exams, homework, summer festivals, athletic competitions. Periodically, the filmmakers tire of even a semblance of normalcy and present genre parodies, including a soap opera set in a ramen parlor and a Prohibition-era Japan where drawing and reading manga are illegal. The animation is cartoonier than most anime, with lots of captions explaining the jokes, signs and labels. ■



Maison Ikkoku

Doki Doki School Hours, Vols. 1-4
[Geneon, \$24.98 per disc]

Maison Ikkoku:
Collector's DVD Set 8
[Vizvideo, \$49.98, three discs]
Piano: The Complete Collection
[Right Stuf, \$59.99, three discs]



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A Farewell to Summer

A hip MTV2 show, a collection of award-winning shorts and a classic British stop-motion production now on DVD, helping us drown our sorrows over the quick passing of summer. **by Ramin Zahed**

The Animation Show: Box Set
[Paramount, \$26.99]
Release: Sept. 5



This one is for all of us who salivate over all the amazing award-winning shorts which unspool at festivals worldwide. Thanks to the efforts of animators Mike Judge (*King of the Hill*) and Don Hertzfeldt (*Rejected*), this collection includes 20 eclectic shorts from recent years. Among the highlights are Oscar nominees—Koji Yamamura's *Mt. Head*, Tomek Baginski's *The Cathedral*, Cordell Barker's *Strange Invaders*, Chris Stenner and Heidi Wittlinger's *The Rocks* and Adam Elliot's *Brother*—as well as Bill Plympton's *Parking*, Judge's *Early Pencil Tests & Other Experi-*



ments and Hertzfeldt's *Billy's Balloon*. Sure, we know there are a lot of other noteworthy shorts out on the festival circuit these days, but acquiring rights to all of them must be a hellish task. For now, this two-volume DVD is great place to start.

The Adventures of Chico and Guapo: Complete First Season
[Paramount, \$26.99]
Release: Sept. 12

Watching MTV2's new animated series *Adventures of Chico and Guapo* ranked high as one of the guilty pleasures of this summer. Now we can rewind season one's entire eight episodes on a new two-disc DVD set, which includes eight shorts about the funny music industry interns as they offer heady comments on trashy pop culture items such as *Newlyweds* and *Laguna Beach*. The release also includes classic episodes from *The Orlando Jones Show*, which gave the animated boys their big start in show biz. Animated storyboards, a director's cut cartoon and artwork are also included in this irreverent offering, which is a throwback to the early days of *Beavis and Butt-Head*.



The Wind in the Willows: Feature Films Collection
[A&E Home Video, \$29.95]
Release: Sept. 26

Mole, Rat, Badger and Toad—the lovable characters of Kenneth Grahame's famous kid lit *The Wind*

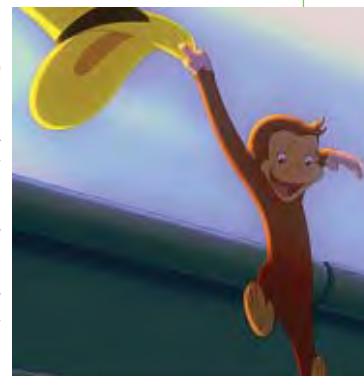


in the Willows come to stop-motion life in this brilliant TV adaptation. Thanks to the masterful craftsmanship of the folks at Cosgrove Hall and the direc-

tion of Mark Hall and Chris Taylor, this handsome 1983 production won numerous awards, including a BAFTA. The DVD also includes the sequel, *A Tale of Two Toads*, in which our fave amphibian is kidnapped! Frankly, all the other adaptations of the book pale in comparison to this stop-mo outing. (Special trivial pursuit factoid: Peter Sallis, the voice of Aardman's Wallace, provides the voice of good old Rat!)

Curious George
[Universal, \$29.98]
Release: Sept. 26

The TV series featuring Margret and H.A. Rey's beloved simian hero is premiering this month on PBS, so it's a good time to catch up with the clever 2D animated feature that made a very respectable \$58.3 million at the U.S. box office early this year.



Directed by Matthew O'Callaghan, this gentle 88-minute adventure features the voices of Will Ferrell, Drew Barrymore, Eugene Levy, Dick Van Dyke and Joan Plowright. The DVD also includes Jack Johnson's "Upside Down" hit video (which is the movie's theme song) and numerous interactive games for the young ones. Next time someone tries to tell you that 2D is dead, you can smack them over the head with this disc. ■

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Junior Snapshots

A quick sampler of some of the new shows and players of the '06 global toon market

In conjunction with the MIPCOM Jr. TV market in Cannes (Oct. 7,8), we spoke to several producers and distributors of animated fare worldwide to get their take on the state of indies and general trends in the business. This is a sampler of what they shared with us:

Nelvana Entertainment

New Series: *Pearlie*

Our Source: Scott Dyer, exec VP of production and development

What's It About? based on the best-selling *Pearlie* books penned by Australian comedienne and radio personality Wendy Hammer, this new series follows the adventures of a glamorous, pint-sized fairy who is the official caretaker of downtown Jubilee Park and tries to organize the lives of all those around her. Targeting kids aged six to 10, the 52x12 show is currently in development and is slated for production in early 2007.

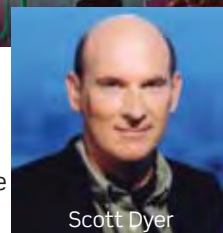
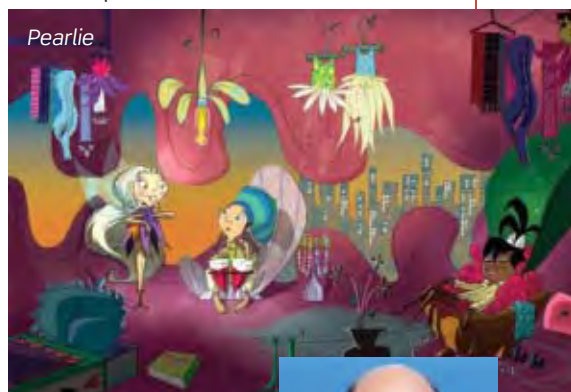
Also in the Works: *Bakugan*, a co-production with Sega Toys, Spin Master, TMS and Japan Vistec, is a new boys' action series aimed at nine to 11-year-olds. Now in production, the show incorporates cards and marble-like balls which transform into multiple collectible characters.

This Year's Slate: "Nelvana has an unsurpassed slate of new shows that are delivering episodes in 2006-07, including *Wayside* (Nick/Teletoon), *Grossology* (Discovery Kids/YTV), *Ruby Gloom* (YTV) and *Backyardigans* (Nick Jr./Treehouse). *Di-Gata Defenders* has just debuted on Teletoon in Canada and *Jane and*

the Dragon premieres this month on NBC/Telemundo/qubo."

Trends and Triumphs: "Multi-platform media is the over

riding issue for our industry. In addition to this trend, from a genre perspective, we're seeing a strong focus on comedy. The demand for smart, sharp comedy like *SpongeBob SquarePants* is huge, as is the hunger for comedic action shows that skew older. This focus on smart comedy is common for the new forms of distribution—and, to a degree, is a result of the rise of the new YouTube generation of consumers."



Scott Dyer

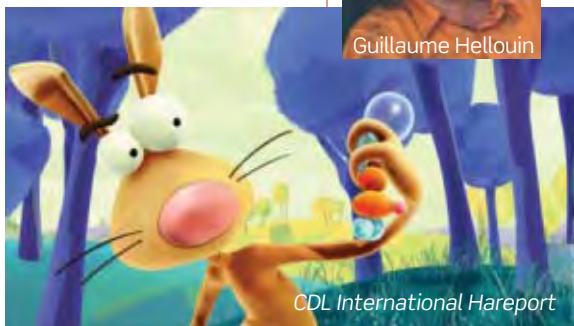
TeamTO

New Series: *CDL International Hareport*

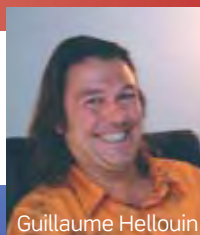
Our Source: Guillaume Hellouin, company founder and president

What's It About? Based on concept and design by Filmwerken's Jan Bultheel, this beautifully animated series explores the slapstick world of Frip and Frap, two young field hares who are surrounded by animals who have mastered the art of flying. The 52x13 series is animated by Alias Maya, but the show has the wonderful and familiar qualities of an old-time Looney Tunes classic. The project will also be presented at Cartoon Forum.

Other Projects: Paris-based indie shop Teamto is also focusing on wrapping work on the second season of the popular animated series *Zoe Kezako*, based on the books by Véronique Sauquère's Zoé Kézako.



CDL International Hareport



Guillaume Hellouin

Trends and Triumphs: "We also have a feature film in development right now. I feel that French animation is really booming this year. I work in CG, so I can see that a lot is happening in CG animation. I also hear a lot of talk about multi-platform shows, but I don't see a lot of new things. When I talk to a lot of people who work in that field, they tell me that it only sells in the U.S. I'm sure we are going to see a lot more happening in that area. We are witnessing the beginnings of a new business, but right now it's difficult to predict where the money will be coming from. After we finish our work on *Zoe Kezako*, we'll be actively looking for partners to investigate the mobile and Internet market. TeamTo brings a new visual style to the 3D animation field."

EM.Entertainment GmbH

New Series: *Dogstar*

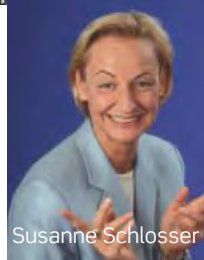
Our Source: Susanne Schlosser, managing director, EM.Entertainment GmbH

What's It About? Glenn, Simon and Lincoln are three average 26th century kids who are searching for a giant ark stuffed with all the animals on Earth after the evacuation of our planet. The 2D-animated show is a Media World Pictures co-venture with ZDF, BBC, EM.TV Group and Daro Film Distribution.

Other Projects: The German outfit is developing a new series titled *Master Raindrop*, an action-adventure show produced by Flux Animation, Big Communications and Yoram Gross-EM.TV. Mixing 2D and CG, the 26x24 min cartoon follows the journey of martial arts novices Raindrop and his friend Shao Yen on their quest to save their Master Yun and the world from the evil schemes of General Bu.

Thoughts on the Big Picture: "In general, the TV animation market is still in the process of consolidation. Nevertheless a modest upward trend is looming on the horizon. From a content perspective, the general quality and variety of children and youth programs are satisfying, and we're seeing more second-season shows arriving on the market.

Trends and Triumphs: "The interactive sector continues to



Susanne Schlosser

influence the market for children's programs—with an emphasis on mobile content, games and IP TV. The establishment of these media platforms is leading to a further diversified range of target groups, instead of a broad mass market. From a content perspective, increased interest on the part of TV stations in educational language programs is clearly evident—with age-appropriate formats for the one- to three-year-old age group, as well as educational language programs for preschoolers.

"In acquiring the remaining 50% of Yoram Gross-EM.TV at the beginning of 2006, Em.Enteratinment GmbH has succeeded in bringing additional strengths to its production abilities. In the years to come, we'll also further activities within the interactive sector with mobile content and games, via Yoram Gross-Em.TV's subsidiary Forest Interactive."

Classic Media

New Series: *George of the Jungle*

Our Source: Sandrine Pechels de Saint Sardos, VP of program distribution

What's It About? Have vine, will travel! Allan Burns' popular cartoon, which was first introduced by Jay Ward Productions in 1967 gets a new lease on life in this animated incarnation delivered by the good folks at Studio B. As usual, George protects the jungle from a never-ending scourge of bad guys, aided by his brainy seven-foot gorilla sidekick Ape, pet elephant Ship and Ursula, the lovely damsel in distress.

Other Projects: Harvey Comic's friendly ghost gets his own CG-animated movie in *Casper's Scare School*. Yes, the pale one enrolls in Scare School to learn his craft, but he uncovers a sinister plot by the cruel, two-headed headmaster. Jim Belushi, Bob Saget, Phyllis Diller, and Dan Castellaneta are part of the impressive voice cast!

Thoughts on the Big Picture: "There is a proliferation of kids' channels in Europe especially in the U.K. and France right now. Therefore competition is always present and evolving. Comedy and action-adventure with a twist are always big. Our biggest challenge in the year ahead is to always stay unique.

George of the Jungle



Casper's Scare School



It's a crowded marketplace again this year, but we're confident that our programming will continue to stand out from the crowd.

Cool Quote: "The most believable way to create a make-believe world is to focus on content and dialogue, and then, character design. In the end, that's really what kids respond to!"



Sandrine Pechels de Saint Sardos

Marathon



New Series: *Monster Buster Club*

Our Source: David Michel, show's co-creator and Senior VP, Marathon Media

What's It About? This 52x30 minute is Marathon's first fully CG-animated series, aimed at 6 to 11-year-olds. It centers on a secret club of alien-fighting ten-year-olds, who are the only ones to know that their town is taken over by aliens. Each episode blends their fun daily lives and their secret alien-crushing adventures. The series was developed in a year's time with Jetix Europe, TF1 and YTV Canada.

The Big Picture: "This year's market is very crowded and, hence, very, very competitive! As far as trends we can see a lot of mixed media series, blending Flash, CGI and traditional animation. Our biggest challenge in 2006-2007 is the success of our new series *Team Galaxy*, which is launching internationally this fall. You can see 2D and CG being used together in shows such as *Team Galaxy* and *Code Lyoko*."

Cool Quote: "Beware of YouTube!"

MarVista Entertainment

New Series: *The Zula Patrol*

Our Source: Fernando Szew, COO/managing director

What's It About: Created by Dr. Deborah Manchester and written by Cydne Clark and Steve Granat, this highly energetic CG toon follows a group of cheerful aliens who teach kids about the different planets, molecules and other scientific fundamentals. The show is aimed at children, three to eight, and can also be used as part of school curricula to teach about science and astronomy.

On the Big Picture: We have evidenced a certain level of maturity in the theatrical realm, in that big-budget animated movies are extremely prolific. Clearly, there's a growing audience, which hopefully won't get oversaturated. As for TV, we see a growing number of creative and innovative shows. In an ever more fragmented world, it's a challenge to find a critical mass for content.

Other News: We recently launched our own home entertainment label, so we continue to seek more content, not just for broadcast and foreign markets, but also for consumers in North America.

Cool Quote: "Be passionate, stay committed and true to your vision—and seek the best possible partners you can!"



Fernando Szew

Smart is beautiful



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The Padded Cel

Of Foie Gras and Cooked Geese: Why MIPCOM Matters to You!



by Robby London

Hey, you! Chained to your monitors, mice, keyboards and styli (and that one lonely holdout reportedly still chained to an actual animation desk) ... Events in the south of France may seem to have little relevance to you—other than making you further despise the executives who control your fate while pairing foie gras with Chateau Lafitte on the French Riviera.

Yes, MIPCOM is underway in Cannes. Along with its April sister (MIP-TV), MIPCOM constitutes the key international television market. October also includes MIPCOM JR.—two days devoted solely to kids' fare, largely animation. Two additional grueling days of being "force fed" foie gras! And, yes, it *is* a dirty, politically incorrect, cholesterol-quadrupling job... but (all together now) *somebody has to do it*. (See my recent column on clichés.)

MIPCOM may *appear* to have little connection to those in the trenches, but in fact it has ramifications for *all* of us who toil in television animation. Speaking with the credibility of one who has attended these markets and kept scrupulously detailed records for precisely umpteen some years, let me assure you that the international market for animation has changed radically.

No longer exclusively dominated by U.S. programs, worldwide animation production has exploded in recent years. Exacerbated by broadcaster quotas (requiring locally produced programs) and government subsidies to homegrown productions, this expansion of suppliers has made TV animation sales fiercely compet-

itive. It's become an immense challenge to piece together sufficient international sales to fund a production. So what's funny about this, you ask? Nothing. (Why should this month's column be different?)

Then what's relevant? The relevance is that economic challenges of production continue to escalate. There may be more broadcast outlets, but they fragment ratings, resulting in the channels

er to ensure our cartoons "play" in AS MANY TERRITORIES as possible. That's particularly challenging with comedy. Comedy is arguably what animation does best and is most marketable—but it's hard enough to be funny in one's own country, let alone in other cultures. Do you think a few Danish political cartoonists currently hiding in undisclosed locations fearing for their lives might have a sense of this? As a

recent fan letter so succinctly put it, "If there's one thing I have learned from reading your columns, Robby, it's that comedy is elusive." (But thanks for reading anyway, mom.)

One of my writing mentors, the late Arthur Nadel, taught me that when you can't be funny, at least be interesting. Let me append that by adding that when you can't be funny *or* interesting, at least don't be suicidal-level depressing. So we will end on an upbeat note by acknowledging the many emerging platforms—such as cell phones, Ipods, and refrigerators (I kid you



Illustration by Mercedes Milligan

paying less—individually and collectively. If you're working on one of the few big worldwide hits that command premium license fees and drive merchandise—you *might* be able to get a raise. Might ... if it weren't for all the other artists, craftspeople, writers and executives whose shows *weren't* worldwide hits—the ones who are currently unemployed and circling your building.

The other relevant thing—and I hate saying this because I know how difficult the creative process is—we must try hard-

not) which *are* (or will be) creating new demand for animation. The good news is these new buyers *are* starting to attend MIPCOM. (Okay, maybe not the fridge companies—yet!) It behooves us to "force feed" our shows to these new media—at meaningful prices and as quickly as possible—if we don't want *our* goose to be cooked! ■

Robby London is an animation industry veteran who is currently pitching a show featuring She-Ra, Xena and Red Sonja stranded on an island, with very limited clothing options.

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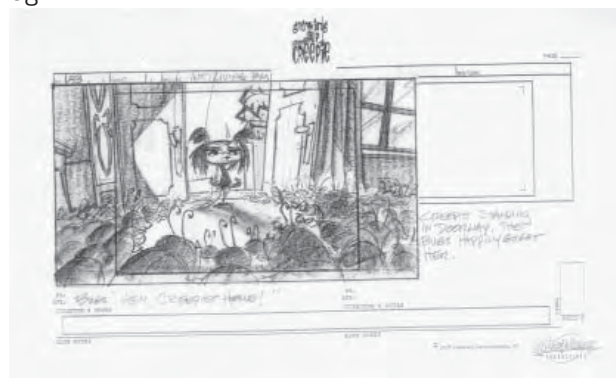


Let's Bug It Out!

In *Growing Up Creepie*, a little girl raised by a family of insects becomes this fall's unlikeliest animated heroine.

From Tarzan to Wolf Boy, tales of abandoned human children raised by animals in the wild have always had a strange hold on our imagination. This month, we get a whole new spin on this theme thanks to a joint venture from Taffy Entertainment, Discovery Kids, Story Hat, DAG, Sunwoo, Peach Blossom and Telegael. Targeting the six to 11-year-old demo, *Growing Up Creepie* has a killer premise: It centers on an odd-looking girl who is raised by a family of bugs—yes, she's different from the other

kids in school and has a special fondness for creepy crawlies! Interestingly, the show's creators have interwoven live-action educational bits about the



Bill Schultz



Guy Vasilovich



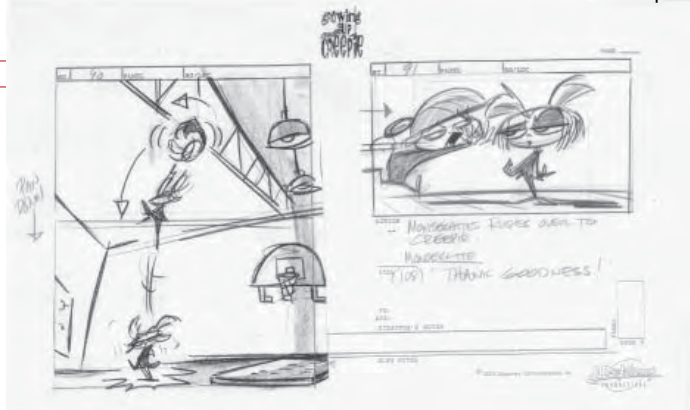
Marjorie Kaplan

natural world, as well as including a subtle message about the challenges of fitting in a melting pot culture.

Originally, the concept was hatched up by Kevin Mowrer and Rob Travalino of Rhode Island-based Story Hat, (the team responsible for *Dragon Booster*) and further developed by Carin Greenberg Baker and the team at Discovery Kids and Mike Young Productions.

"Discovery wanted us to explore a more stylized, darker version than what had been previously discussed, so I immediately thought about Guy Vasilovich—a respected art director and animator with whom I had worked at Film Roman for many years," says the show's exec producer, industry veteran Bill Schultz. "Guy came in and did some original concept sketches and [Discovery Kids' general manager and exec VP] Marjorie Kaplan loved the drawings. She is both creative and smart—and those are great qualities to have as a head of a network! Those drawings really gave us the real signature that we needed to break through the clutter."

Vasilovich, a seasoned artist who has worked on Disney classics such as *The Fox and the Hound*, *The Black Cauldron* and *The Great Mouse Detective* and TV series like *C-Bear* and *Jamal*, says he really appreciated the creative freedom the show afforded him. "Bill [Schultz] kept asking me to push the design as far as I could go," says Vasilovich. "We wanted something that would work as a children's show, while being vi-



Casting Her Web: Guy Vasilovich and his team of animators created a signature walk for Creepie that is reminiscent of the way a bug skitters and turns in sharp angles—in contrast to the smoother, more organic way the other kids move in the show.



sually exciting, something that you don't see out there. The direction we got from Marjorie [Kaplan] was to make it safely scary."

For Kaplan, one of the show's winning points was its subtle message. She explains, "What I love most about the series is its message that 'it's OK to be different.' Just like kids often feel misunderstood, bugs are often underestimated by people. Creepie stands up for bugs and in doing so, she stands up for herself."

Another aspect of the Flash-animated show that makes it different from other toons this season is its unique production pipeline. "You need to work a little harder to get the stretch-and-squash feel we're used to in traditional cel animation," says Schultz. "However, Flash is very multi-platform friendly, gives you more control, and it helped us when we launched the show's website on Discovery Kids. We have the writers come up with two- or three-page outlines first. We then have the outlines go through the network's and



our note process and afterwards, we hand them over to Guy and the storyboard artists. So the first draft of the storyboards are done without scripts."

Schultz explains that this storyboard-based production process had several advantages. "It forced the show to be more visual," he says. "It has a unique pacing and sensibility that wouldn't have been achieved if you had done the scripts before the storyboards. We had a big collaborative process that had us going from outline to storyboard to animatic and then to writing the scripts. It's been a rewarding process—if you can afford to do it this way." (*Creepie* reportedly costs about \$300,000 to \$350,000 to produce per episode.)

Vasilovich believes that Creepie's unique personality really drives the show. "She's likable and is interesting to watch," he says. "We created this signature walk for her—she skitters like a bug and turns in sharp angles in contrast to regular kids who move more naturally and organically. Al-

though she's not negative and doesn't have the bitter, disenfranchised qualities of Goth kids, she is familiar with the bug world and growing up in dark, creepy places. She makes you drawn to a darker reality!"

Since Vasilovich is a widely loved and respected artist, his work has added a certain level of sophistication to the cartoon. "Guy is a phenomenal artist," says Schultz. "Tim Burton has nothing on him! I'm very proud of the look and feel of the show. The visuals are really gorgeous, and the backgrounds are more detailed and rich in atmosphere." And, of course, the show's biggest secret weapon may be its six-legged creatures. "Just last week, I was walking around Bell Canyon (Calif.) and I noticed this strange-looking bug with huge claws like a scorpion," says Schultz. "I tell you, these days, I have a new appreciation for what bugs are all about!" ■

Growing Up Creepie premieres on Discovery Kids Channel's ReelToons lineup, Saturday, September 9 at 7:30 p.m.

A Legion of Their Own

Almost half a century after its debut in the pages of DC Comics, *Legion of Super Heroes* gets its own stylish Warner Bros. toon.

by Ramin Zahed



Good things come to those who wait—for 48 years. For many years, fans of Otto Binder and Al Plastino's team of time-traveling crime-fighters have been holding their collective breath, hoping for a true-to-form animated adaptation of their popular characters featured in *Legion of Super Heroes*. This month, thanks to the efforts of the creative team at Warner Bros. Animation, a new series charts the adventures of the 31st Century heroes.

With Bryan Singer's live-action adaptation of *Superman Returns* fresh in the mind of many moviegoers, it's only synergistic to have a new show featuring the Man of Steel (in his younger days). Through the years, the team has gone under numerous mutations and changes—and the Legion actually includes over a dozen full-time members. The new animated version of *Legion of Super Heroes* centers on Superman (voiced by Yuri Lowenthal) and 5 other core members of his group—Lightning Lad, Saturn Girl, Timber Wolf, Brainiac 5, Bouncing Boy and Phantom Girl.

"This is the first time the Legion have been animated in their own series although members of the team have appeared in episodes of *Superman: The*



Animated Series and *Justice League Unlimited*," says Sander Schwartz, the show's exec producer and the president of Warner Bros. Animation. "We're very excited that our core audience of action adventure fans will have the opportunity to be familiar with these characters."

Schwartz says the fact that the show takes place in the 31st century has given the producers and creators a whole new set of possibilities and environments to play with. He says the very specific animation style and art direction of the toon also reflects the taste and style of the producers James Tucker (a protégé of Bruce Timm of the acclaimed *Batman* and *Superman* series)

and Linda Steiner (*Teen Titans*, *Duck Dodgers*). "Although there are similarities in the styles, the show really reflects the look and visual style of its supervising producers James and Linda, and the directors Ben Jones, Lauren Montgomery and Tim Maltby."

For James Tucker, who cut his teeth on classics such as *Animaniacs* back in the early 90s and went on to work on shows such as *The New Batman Adventures*, *Teen Titans* and *Justice League*, *Legion* offered a great opportunity to expand his vision and creativity. "The show gave us a chance to create a world that was very old-school in a way," he says. "It's not trying to be edgy and avant-garde. It's solid, old-fashioned and plays it straight. *Teen*



Sander Schwartz



James Tucker

Titans did what it does better than anybody else, that's why we didn't want to follow in that route again. For me, *Legion* has the right balance of humor and action adventure."

Fans may also get a special kick out of the look of the show, which Tucker says he thought was going to be a cross between *Superman: The Animated Series* and Genndy Tartakovsky's *Star Wars: Clone Wars*. "However, when we saw the finished version, it didn't look like anything we'd seen before."

The bulk of *Legion's* animation is done at Korea's Dong Woo and Lot-to studios, and as Tucker points out, it's mostly 2D. However, some CG is used for special effects (i.e. explosions, interplanetary vehicles, etc.). Overall, Tucker says what makes the show special is the superior level of craftsmanship that is displayed in every level of the production. "Just on a pragmatic level, you see this level of excellence reflected in all aspects of the show."

Tucker says he's happy that the team has been faithful to the many different incarnations of the Legion. "The fandom is very loyal ... they're like country music fans in many way," says Tucker. "I know these characters have gone through numerous changes. The comic book has stopped and started again and been re-booted. But we've tried to absorb a lot of the comic's continuity in our cartoon. I know the show is supposed to stand on its own, but I'm a comic book fan myself. I just can't help it!" ■

Legion of Super Heroes premieres on Kids' WB! (The CW) on September 23rd at 11 a.m.

Familiar Toons Get Mod Makeovers

Legion of Super Heroes isn't the only heat-seeking weapon in the Kids' WB! arsenal this fall. Warner Bros. Animation has prepared a nice mix of old favorites and new toons to keep the competition at bay, now that the toon block is part of the new, super-charged CW channel.

Hanna-Barbera's world-famous cat-and-mouse team make a much-anticipated return to the TV airwaves in a new series called *Tom and Jerry Tales*. Produced by Frank Molieri and Tom Minton and exec produced by Sander Schwartz, the series was first commissioned for international territories to quench the global hunger for toons featuring the mischievous pair.

"There was such a huge demand for *Tom and Jerry* cartoons overseas," explains Schwartz. "The shows continue to be our strongest franchise in countries like France and Japan. We really wanted to stay true to the origins of the characters. Of course, neither Tom nor Jerry talk in the original shorts, so we stuck with the same format. Each half-hour show is made up of three shorts, while each show focuses on one specific theme."

Schwartz says the produces, along with story editors Richard Pursel and Tom Minton, looked back at the rich history of the cat-and-mouse duo and came up with new angles and storylines for the characters. "You don't want to make the same cartoon over and over again," says Schwartz. "Since the show was in demand by international buyers, we have Tom and Jerry travel all over the world. We take them out of the house and find them in cities and exotic locations."

Two other familiar characters from the Hanna-Barbera library will find themselves getting a new maker-over and a fresh new premise. Warner Bros. Animation's *Shaggy & Scooby-Doo Get a Clue!* answers the age-old question: What would happen if our crime-solving buddies inherit a billion dollars from a mysteriously vanished inventor uncle by the name of Dr. Shaggleford. In this high-energy new toon, Shaggy and Scoops even have a personal robot butler called Robi, a Smart House computer and a high-tech Mystery Machine that can transform into all kinds of cool objects. Of course, while the pair is searching for the missing uncle all over the world, they'll have to fend off the evil schemes of master villain Dr. Phineus Phibes. Yes, hilarity ensues.

Warner Bros. tapped veteran animation talent Eric Radomski (*Batman, Spawn, Xiaolin Showdown*) to deliver this fresh spin on Scooby and Shaggy. "We think it'll be a big hit because it takes characters that we've loved and enjoyed for many years and puts them front and center as the focus of a new show in situations that we haven't seen before," says Schwartz who also exec produces the toon. "When you have characters that have been featured in 300-plus episodes and seven or eight direct-to-DVD features and two live-action movies, you have to shake things up to keep things fresh!"



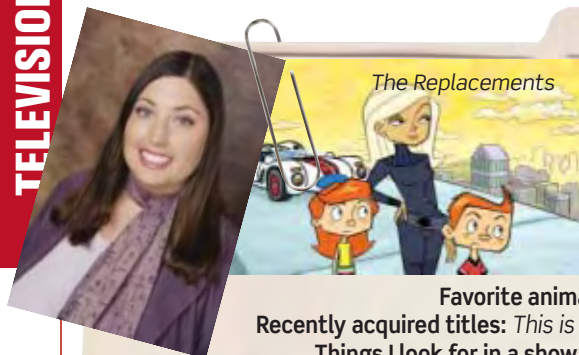
the adventures of an "allergic" 12-year-old named Zick who can see strange monsters in his hometown of Oldmill—think of it as a Euro-Pokémon with germs! Buckle up because Saturday mornings may never be the same! ■



Who Are These People?

Want to learn more about the movers and shakers who make all the big decisions about buying and green-lighting toons around the world? This new *Animation Magazine* feature should help you get up-close and personal with some of these key execs!

by Evelyn Jacobson



Robin Agranoff

Director of Program
Planning & Acquisitions
Disney Channel,
Playhouse Disney & ABC Kids

Years in the biz: 12

Hometown: Los Angeles

Favorite animated show of 2006: *The Replacements*

Recently acquired titles: *This is Emily Yeung, Life with Derek, Minuscule*

Things I look for in a show: Kid-driven comedy, unique characters

What I hate to see: Lack of originality

Favorite vacation spot: Anyplace where I can visit family and friends

Favorite Restaurant on the Riviera: La Cave

The Movie/Book/TV show that changed my life: *Sesame Street, The Magic Garden and Free to Be You and Me*

Favorite rock band/performer: Miley Cyrus as Hannah Montana

Shows I always TiVo: *Grey's Anatomy, Gilmore Girls, House, Prison Break, Dancing with the Stars, The Sopranos*

Why I love my job: I love hearing from kids and parents how our programs have influenced their lives for the better.

Industry catch phrases I hope I'll never have to hear again: "This show is truly the next *SpongeBob*."



Andrew Beecham

SVP
Programming,
PBS KIDS Sprout

Years in the biz: 20ish

Hometown: London, U.K.

Favorite animated show of 2006: *The Many Adventures of Mr. Mailman* (a shameless plug, sorry, but it's great!)

Recently acquired titles: *Jakers!, The Adventures of Piggly Winks*

Things I look for in a show: Could I possibly watch this with my pre-schooler without tearing my hair out?

Things I hate to see: Tree People

Favorite vacation spot: Anywhere as long as there's water and a sailboat (and no tree people)

Favorite Restaurant on the Riviera:

Anywhere that takes corporate AmEx

The Movie/Book/TV show that changed my life: *The Big Blue* (Luc Besson)

Favorite rock band/performer: P.D.Q. Bach
Shows I always TiVo: *Arrested Development* and *The Office* (U.S. version)

Why I love my job: An amazing team, a great boss and the potential for Sprout to be as successful as *Sesame Street*

Industry catch phrases I hope I'll never have to hear again: It's got the potential to be as successful as *Sesame Street*...

Malcolm Bird

SVP Kids and Teens, AOL

Years in the biz: 23

Hometown: Warrington, England

Favorite animated show of 2006: *Pilar's Adventures*

Recently acquired titles: *Jacob Two Two*

Things I look for in a show: Characters, story, sustainability, humor.

Things I hate to see: Re-tread cartoons! Be original.

Favorite vacation spot: Jamaica

Favorite Restaurant on the Riviera: The Kings Head (English Riviera)

The Movie/Book/TV show that changed my life: *Kitchen Confidential* by Anthony Bourdain... never order fish on a Monday, always order fish on a Tuesday.

Favorite rock band/performer: Ethel and the Aardvarks

Shows I always TiVo: *Entourage* (It's so flattering to have your own biographical show on TV!)

Why I love my job: You never know what you can do next, the limit is your imagination and in my job I get to do a whole host of very exciting things.

Industry catch phrases I hope I'll never have to hear again: "We have something in development just like that !!!!!!!!"



Carole Bonneau

VP Programming, TELETOON Canada

Years in the biz: 25

Hometown: Toronto, Canada

Favorite animated show of 2006: ...is airing on TELETOON!

Recently acquired titles: *Kappa Mikey*, *Ben 10*, *Johnny Test*, *Loonatics Unleashed*, *Robot Chicken*, *Space Ghost Coast to Coast*, *Squidbillies*, *Stroker & Hoops*, *Tom Goes to the Mayor*, *12oz Mouse*, *Ripping the Rift*.

Things I look for in a show: Bold, spontaneous and smart

Things I hate to see: Deja vu!

Favorite vacation spot: Anywhere with my family

Favorite Restaurant on the Riviera: Astoux and Cie Brun for the coquillages

The Movie/Book/TV show that changed my life: None!

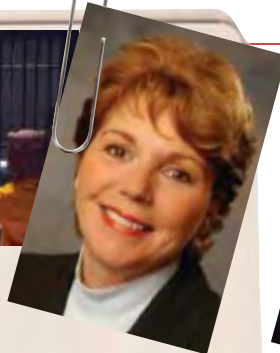
Favorite rock band/performer: Nickelback

Shows I always TiVo: Don't own one!

Why I love my job: Because I am constantly inspired by the creativity around me

Industry catch phrases I hope I'll never have to hear again: This is the next *SpongeBob*!

Robot Chicken!



Bleach

John

Easum

Executive Vice President, VIZ Media

Years in the biz: Over 17

Hometown: New York City (born in West Africa)

Favorite animated show of 2006: *Zatch Bell!* *Naruto*

Recently Acquired Titles: *Bleach*, *M.A.R.*, *Zoids Genesis*

Things I look for in a show: Strength of story, depth and variety of characters.

Things I hate to see: Jokes that don't translate; long dialogue that doesn't go anywhere; lack of monsters, robots and nasty evil bad guys.

Favorite Vacation Spot: My family and I are nomadic, so we refuse to vacation in the same place twice. But Corsica and the Maldives are very high on the list of past spots.

Favorite Restaurant on the Riviera: A Thai-Vietnamese-Chinese-Indonesian restaurant called Pousse Pousse in Juan les Pins.

The movie/book/TV show that changed my life: *Tampopo*. I saw this movie right after graduating from university. It showed me a very different perspective of Japan and convinced me to move there. I hadn't realized the Japanese had such an outrageous sense of humor...and bizarre fascination with food

Favorite rock band/performer: Way too many to single anyone out.

Shows I always TiVo: *Entourage*

Why I love my job: I get to speak three languages each day; travel to amazing places like Tokyo, Paris and New York; amass unhealthy quantities of air miles; watch large amounts of animation and collect action figures.

Industry catch phrases I hope I'll never have to hear again: My dog ate my Blackberry.

Michael Carrington

Creative Director, Children's BBC

Years in the biz: 20 years

Hometown: Sydney, Australia

Favorite animated show of 2006: *Charlie & Lola*, *Tiger Aspect Productions*

Recently acquired titles: *LazyTown*, *Mama Mirabelle's Home Movies*, *Underground Ernie*, *Pozzie*

Things I look for in a show: Strong engaging narrative, visually stimulating artwork or production design

Things I hate to see: Talking eggs

Favorite vacation spot: Pearl Beach, Australia

Favorite Restaurant on the Riviera: Colombe D'Or

The Movie/Book/TV show that changed my life: *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* by Richard Bach

Favorite rock band/performer: The Feds

Shows I always TiVo: *Property Ladder*, *Desperate Housewives*, *Dragon's Den*

Why I love my job: I can help make children laugh their heads off!

Industry catch phrases I hope I'll never have to hear again: Do you have five minutes?, I'm not going to pitch you, but ... It's for children aged nine to 99.



Ernie

Kevin Gillis

Executive Producer/Managing Partner,
Breakthrough Animation

Years in the biz: Too many and not enough

Hometown: Ottawa, Canada

Favorite animated show of 2006: *Family Guy*

Recently acquired titles: "King of Canada...oh wait, you didn't mean MY title, you meant PROGRAM titles..."

Things I look for in a show: My name in the credits

Things I hate to see: Bad music.

Favorite vacation spot: My cottage in the upper Ottawa Valley

Favorite Restaurant on the Riviera: Gaston Gastonet

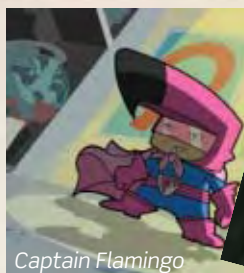
The Movie/Book/TV show that changed my life: *The Raccoons*; *The Point* (I even named my cat Oblio)

Favorite rock band/performer: Concertbegouw, Gorillaz

Shows I always TiVo: *Without a Trace* (in case I get lost someday)

Why I love my job: My team. They make coming to work a joy every day.

Industry catch phrases I hope I'll never have to hear again: I'm afraid it's not hitting the target audience.



Captain Flamingo



Michael Lekes

Senior VP Programming,
Jetix Europe

Years in the biz: 18

Hometown: Toronto, Canada

Favorite animated show of 2006:

Oban Star-Racers, the most beautiful and emotional animated story to come along in years

Recently acquired titles: *Captain Flamingo*, *Naruto*

Things I look for in a show: Innovative techniques, intelligent storytelling, characters with genuine heart

Things I hate to see: Derivative pitches or formulaic, cliché-ridden series that put product before program.

Favorite vacation spot: Barcelona

Favorite Restaurant on the Riviera: The chef's table at the Palme d'Or, best dining experience ever.

The Movie/Book/TV show that changed my life: *Superman* (1978)

Favorite rock band/performer: At the moment, the Red Hot Chili Peppers for pure showmanship.

Shows I always TiVo: *Doctor Who*, *The West Wing*

Why I love my job: It justifies a childhood spent in the cinema and in front of the TV, hopefully bringing some of that same magic to a new generation.

Industry catch phrases I hope I'll never have to hear again: Content is king. Has there ever been a more redundant statement in entertainment?



Oban Star-Racer



Space Goofs

Julia Tenret

Head of Acquisitions, Canal J TiJi,
Filles-TV and Gulli

Years in the biz: 5

Hometown: Caen, Normandy

Favorite animated show 2006: *SAM*
SAM (in production Bayard Jeunesse)

Recently acquired titles: *Space Goofs II*,
Faireez, *Clueless*, *Street Football*

Things I like in a show: Values like team spirit, solidarity, generosity combined with comedy

Things I hate: Unjustified violence, aggressive behaviors

Favorite vacation spot: Italy

Favorite restaurant on the Riviera: I don't like to eat there

The movie, TV show or book that changed my life: Movie: *The Incredible Shrinking Man* from Jack Arnold, TV show: *The Fourth Dimension* and *Fraggle Rock*, Book: *Belle du seigneur* by Albert Cohen.

Favorite rock band: George Clinton and the Funkadelics

Shows I always TiVo: *The Simpsons*

Why I love my job: Meeting friendly people with a child's mentality and point of view

Industry catch phrases I hope I'll never have to hear again: None!



Wub Wub Wubbzy

Adina Pitt

VP Acquisitions, Nickelodeon, Nicktoons;
Director of Programming, Nicktoons

Years in the biz: 12

Hometown: San Juan, Puerto Rico

Favorite animated show of 2006: *The Simpsons*

Recently acquired titles: Still haven't announced these- waiting for press releases.

Things I look for in a show: To get a visceral reaction from an idea/concept. Creator-driven shows always rise above the rest.

Things I hate to see: Gratuitous violence, poorly dubbed shows.

Favorite vacation spot: British Virgin Islands

Favorite Restaurant on the Riviera: Gavroche

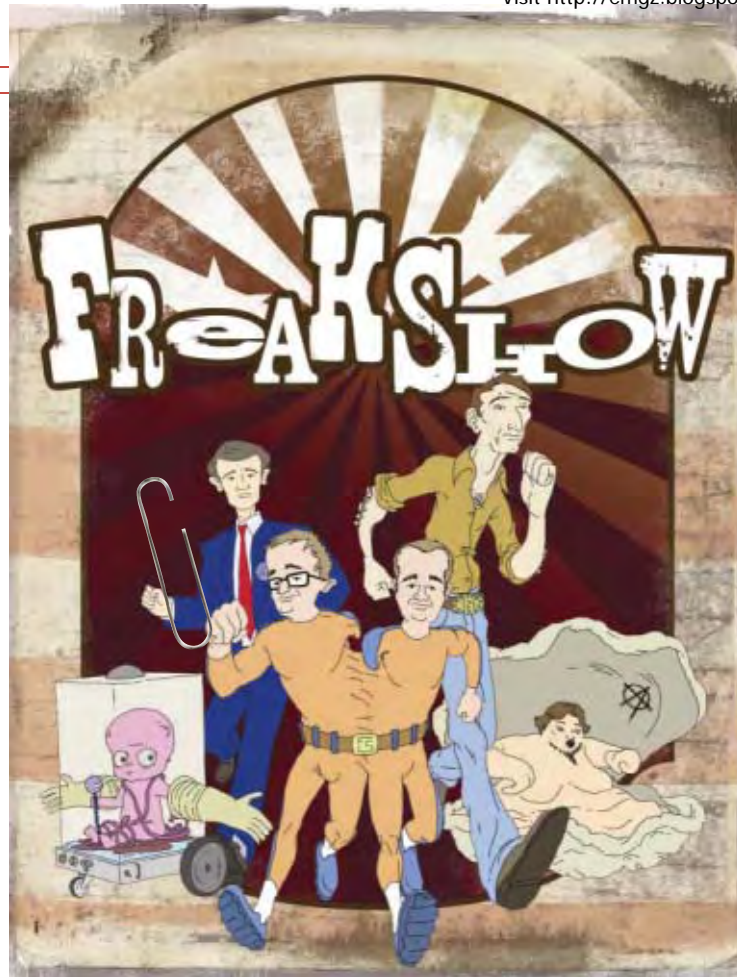
The Movie/Book/TV show that changed my life: *Star Wars*. Book: It's a tie between *Confessions of a Shopaholic* and *Instant Yiddish*. Show: *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*.

Favorite rock band/performer: Alejandro Sanz

Shows I always TiVo: *Max and Ruby*, *SpongeBob SquarePants*, *Entourage*, *Grey's Anatomy*

Why I love my job: I love the Nickelodeon brand and what it stands for. I love the search for content and the process of putting all the pieces together in hopes of making something great. I love that I know people from all over the world and some of these friendships have made me a better person.

Industry catch phrases I hope I'll never have to hear again: This is a compelling saga; What's your demo?; It's like *SpongeBob* meets... blank; Jules and Debbie really love this!; Curriculum?; Can you put together a deck?



Freaks and Geeks

Comedy Central adds *Freak Show* to its cartoon lineup.

by Ryan Ball

Before the Discovery Channel, people who wanted to see extreme birth defects, parasitic twins or morbidly obese women with beards had to wait for the traveling sideshow to roll through town. Those days are revisited in *Freak Show*, a new animated Comedy Central series that turns a band of oddities into a second-rate superhero force hired by the U.S. government to complete low-priority missions. The series debuts on Oct. 4 at 10:30 p.m., which, on the current schedule, sandwiches it nicely between the network's top shows, *South Park* and *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*.

Freak Show is created by actor/comedian David Cross (*Arrested Development*, *Mr. Show*) and animation voice veteran H. Jon Benjamin (*Home Movies*, *Dr. Katz: Professional Therapist*). Cross tells us he was looking for a project that would allow him to go back to New York should the unthinkable happen—FOX canceling the critically acclaimed *Arrested Development*. But

primetime's loss is toonodom's gain as fans look forward to seeing what sublime lunacy issues forth from these cult-favorite comic talents.

Cross and Benjamin first began working together in comedy groups in Boston circa 1988, but never thought of making an animated show together until now. *Freak Show* is animated at Atlanta-based Radical Axis, where the creators have been very hands-on with the animation. "It's an indispensable part of the show," Cross remarks. "I can't imagine creating something I'm this close with and then just sort of putting it in somebody else's hands where I don't get to help shape it for six months and then going, 'Gosh, I hope it looks good.' It's just a natural, organic part of the process."

Cross says that one thing he and his co-creator really pushed for was more dynamic screen direction—more close-ups, point-of-view shots and camera moves. "It was sort of static when they first started working on it and we've been working with them to get it more dramatic

through sort of a false sense of cinema."

According to Cross, the team Radical Axis really nailed the character designs, which helped get them the job in the first place. The crew is animating seven episodes of *Freak Show* in Flash and compositing the scenes in After Effects with approximately 40 artists hard at work on Macintosh G5s. One episode takes an average of 18 weeks to complete.

"There's definitely a bit of grunginess to the animation as far as the style and the look of it," says studio founder and CEO Scott Fry. "We went back and looked at old 1950s and even '40s carnival posters that sort of had that dark and brushed effect where they would basically paint posters on the side of buildings with glue to get it to stick and it just sort of has this really rough feel to it."

Animation director Craig Hartin says he wanted to avoid a lot of the things that Flash is known for. "I didn't want that puppeteered look or where everything is squash-and-stretch and sort of that Looney Tunes, wacky feel," he comments. "I wanted to go a little bit further with making it more traditional. If there's a 'tween that needs to be put in there, I want people to actually be hand-drawing it rather than motion 'tweening or trying to use what's there and breaking it up. It's still on the side of limited because we're recycling as much animation as we can in order to make sure we get it done, but it's definitely a lot more ambitious than what we've done in Flash to this point."

Radical Axis has provided animation for such [adult swim] shows as *Aqua Teen Hunger Force*, *Sealab 2021*, *Squidbillies* and *12-oz. Mouse*, and recently wrapped production on the *Aqua Teen Hunger Force* feature film, which is slated to hit theaters in February of next year. Also on the studio's plate are several promos for Cartoon Network and an animated project for Comedy Central's Motherload broadband channel.

Cross has been doing voiceovers for a number of animated films, including DreamWorks' upcoming *Kung Fu Panda*. He's also providing voices for various characters on *Freak Show*, which he says has something for everyone. "It's not just one kind of comedy," he explains. "There are some gross jokes, some topical jokes, some political jokes, some pop-culture jokes and just crazy, absurdist sh**, too. There's a nice mix of all that kind of stuff. I think it's got 60% more laughs than other shows." We'll have to check the laugh-o-meter on that one. ■

***Freak Show* premieres October 4th at 10:30 p.m. on Comedy Central.**



Scott Fry



Craig Hartin



David Cross

A Great Start for Baestarts

The young, vibrant animation studio in Budapest invites investment opportunities, co-production deals and original projects.

Animation producers may have a new reason to visit the picturesque city of Budapest this year. They may even be able to write off the whole trip as toon research. For the past couple of years, the Budapest-based Studio Baestarts has gathered the top talent for Eastern and Central Europe under one roof to work on cost-effective high-quality direct-to-DVD and feature productions.

"The message we'd like to send out to the animation community is three-fold," says Andras Erkel, the studio's talented managing director, who formed the venture after many successful years at Varga. "Not only will we operate as excellent service providers, we're also actively working with co-producers as well as developing our own original productions for TV, features and new media platforms."

Erkel and his team sharpened their skills at Varga Studios, working on productions such as *Mr. Bean: The Animated Series* and many other award-winning and top rated shows. As he puts it, animation is a rich part of the region's cultural history. "Central and eastern European artists have played a big role in animation from the very beginning of the art form" Erkel notes. "It's not something that we tried to learn in only a short time. The first animation studio in Hungary was founded in the early nineteenthirties. We have excellent animators from the region who were trained by the old masters."

The relatively low price tag may also entice future business to the region. "Although the labor isn't as cheap as Asia or the Far East, it is still significantly cheaper than the majority of western countries," says Erkel. "There are also significant fi-

nancial rewards thanks to the Hungarian film law's tax scheme that was introduced two years ago, which enables us to raise 20% of the budget here."

Among the various projects Baestarts has been involved with is the hit Scandi feature *Pettson and Findus*, which is based on the book series by popular children's author, Sven Nordqvist. Co-produced by Happy Life, TV-Loonland and A-Film, the 2D animated feature, which was animated at Baestarts, was the top performer at the Scandinavian box office last Christmas.

Other projects include direct-to-DVD animated features including two new *Angelina Ballerina* specials (for Hit Entertainment), an animated special based on Holly Hobbie's *Toot & Puddle* (for National Geographic Kids) in association with Grand-Slamm Children Films and the adaptation of popular Swedish author's work *Lorange, Muffin & Dartanjang* (for Svensk). Baestarts also played a key role in creating two projects for this month's Cartoon Forum event—the preschool series *Ping and Pong* (in co-production with U.K.'s Novel Entertainment) and the 3D, CGI show *Beats* (in co-production with Svensk and Happy Life).

"We are certainly looking to increase our role as co-production partners in the future, and not just on the financial side" notes Erkel. "We'd like to be involved on the creative side—participate in design and direction—as well as the service aspects of animated projects." He points to the fact that his studio was able to deliver all the aforementioned projects in less than two years and that his team is preparing for a bigger and more ambitious slate in 2007.

Among others, adaptations of children's books

play a prominent role in Baestarts' development plans. "We have optioned the French book property *Ma Maison* and we are developing it into a series of animated comic shorts in the genre of *Monty Python's Flying Circus* show," adds Erkel. "We also have a series of two-minute bumpers titled *Roy*, which is based on a wonderful Swedish comic strip and we have very serious interest from major broadcasters in Europe." Both projects are planned for mobile platforms too.

In addition, Baestarts with U.K. based partners, is developing a feature about a young sumo wrestling boy named Bento, and another one which is based on a best-selling children's book in Hungary, both will incorporate a combination of 2D and CG animation. "We rely on a variety of animation and vfx software, from SoftimageXSI through 3DMax to Alias Maya," says Erkel.

The studio is also heavily involved in the production of commercials and music videos. Last year it produced over 30 commercials for blue-chip clients like Kellogg's, Barilla and Johnson & Johnson. They also have a development deal with a top international record company, but due to the nature of the project we are not allowed to mention which company nor which projects.

On the training and education front, Baestarts has teamed up with the Applied Art Academy in Budapest to offer training and production opportunities for two diploma students every year. "We help the students produce two of the best diploma film ideas, which we select in conjunction with the university, and we help finance the production and house the projects at our studio (like AU)," notes Erkel. "After graduation, we also offer the students the opportunity to work with us and provide them additional training and possible employment. It's our way of helping develop and retain the region's rich cultural legacy of animation." ■



Beats



Ping & Pong



AU

Explore the Amazing World of *Animation Magazine!*

Besides your monthly magazine, we offer a rich variety of informative survival tools for today's complicated toon and vfx landscape:

Animation Magazine Online [AMO]

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Our addictive, colorful website offers new content daily, keeping you informed about everything you need to know about the fast-changing world of animation and vfx.

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You won't have to wait for the mail to deliver the print version of the magazine. The pdf version of the magazine can be emailed to your desktop as soon as the pages are produced at our offices.

Animated People

Get up-close and personal with the fascinating people behind the toons in these monthly web-exclusive profiles.

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Perfecting the Pitch in Pau

Producers from 29 European countries gather at Cartoon Forum to share ideas and get their hands on some good old-fashioned financing. **by Ramin Zahed**

Talk to some producers these days and you may get the idea that financing your next animated series can be as difficult as getting Lindsay Lohan to stay away from a hot L.A. night spot. That's why events like Europe's Cartoon Forum are so essential for the health of this business. Scheduled for September 20-23 in the picturesque French town of Pau (in the western Pyrénées) this year, this Eurocentric confab invites animation producers and executives to mingle with reps from TV outlets and financial backers. It's a practical way to keep the region's toon business alive and encourage creative types to present their latest ideas to the suits and get feedback from colleagues and execs.

Three hundred projects from 29 countries will be presented at the Forum this year. According to the organizers, 45% of these series are aimed at children (age six to 13), 22% target preschoolers and 11 shows are created for all ages. Interestingly enough, unlike their feature film counterparts, CG-animated shows represent only 35% of the projects. Other interesting data: France is on top of the list with 18 projects and three co-productions, followed by the U.K. with 10 shows and only one co-pro. Germany and Italy have four shows (with three co-pros for Germany and one co-pro for Italy) each while Belgium has three series in the running and two co-productions. Netherlands and Spain have three shows, while Ireland and Finland clock in with two productions each. There are also entries from Sweden, Austria, Denmark, Luxembourg, Norway, Slovenia and Latvia.

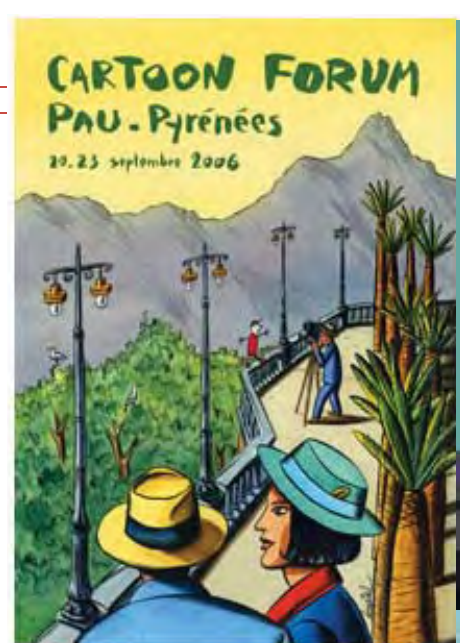
Folimage is one of several French companies bringing new toons to the

Forum. The pitch centers on a little blue donkey with big glasses who ponders the quiet moments of everyday life. Based on a French children's publication, *Ariol* is a 26x12 2D-animated property which seems perfect for the six- to nine-year-olds.

"We wanted the look of the show to be very close to the original book's drawings by Marc Boutavant," says Folimage's director Pascal Le Notre. "We started in 2D, in standard High Def, using paper cut-out animation, with new techniques developed at the studio."

Le Notre says an event like Cartoon Forum accelerates the financing process. "Our 1999 series *Hilltop Hospital*, for example, began production only six months after a good presentation at Cartoon Forum," he notes. Today, if you were to see each broadcaster one at a time, it is quite difficult to get quick answers from them."

As far as the big picture goes, Le



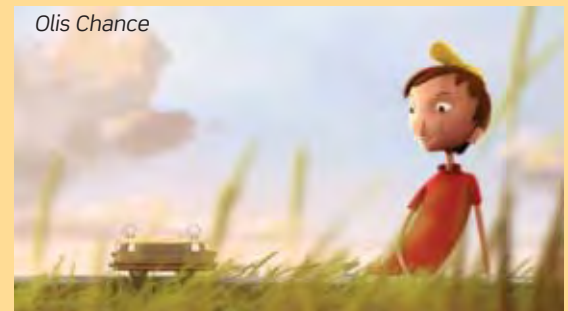
Notre believes European animators are in a good place today. "Broadcasters are more respectful of the children's audience than adults. The animation quality is going to be increased by the HD format, which is very close to 2K. It works better with animated programs than sports. In Europe, we have many great animation schools and great stories to tell. And now, with HD, the small screen is going to have a very strong high-quality standard."

U.K.-based Greenlit Rights makes it Forum debut with a show called *Dog Squad*. Aimed at the six- to nine-year-old demo, the 26x11 series follows the adventures of six police pooches in training as they get in and out of all kinds of troubles.

Short D'Or

In addition to the main event, CARTOON (European Assoc. of Animation Film) and the EU Media program will present the 2006 Cartoon D'Or at the closing ceremony of the Forum on Sep. 23. The jury is composed of French producer Didier Brunner, Dutch director Michael Dudok de Wit and Portuguese director José Miguel Ribeiro. The 2006 nominees are:

- *Dreams and Desires—Family Ties* by Joanna Quinn (U.K.)
- *Tragic Story with Happy Ending* by Regina Pessoa (Portugal/France/Canada)
- *Nocturne* by Guillaume Delaunay (France)
- *Olis Chance* by Saschka Unseld and Johannes Weiland (Germany)
- *Overtime* by Oury Atlan, Thibaut Berland and Damien Ferrie (France)





Dog Squad



Ariel



Benny and Boil



Brian's Brain

"It was inspired by a true story, a call for dogs to be donated to a police force in the north of England," says Greenlit producer Eve Gutierrez. "We were stunned that people would essentially offer up a member of the family, but also fascinated by the idea that dogs would find themselves unceremoniously ejected from a warm bed by the fire-side, straight into a world of crime fighting!"

According to Gutierrez, the toon's animation team at Traffic Films relied on popular software CelAction 2D. "They've been using the software for some years now. Using depth in backgrounds and complex character builds which allow for fluid yet very efficient production, *Dog Squad* will push this excellent software to another level," she believes.

This being the company's first year at the Forum, Gutierrez says she hopes that by attending, they'll be in a position to bring all the necessary production elements together for the show. "It's going to be enormously informative to see the other ideas being developed

across Europe and get a sense of the tastes of each market," she adds. Producer Nigel Pay and his team at U.K.'s hot toon house Tandem Films are presenting *Benny and Boil*, a beautifully drawn series about a couple of hapless trolls who set out on a quest for a new home in the countryside. "The show originated from one of our animators as a half-hour special," says Pay. "When we realized that there was almost no chance to get funding with that format, we forgot it for a while. Then one day, whilst looking through the material, it occurred to us that such a strong idea could easily adapt to a multi-episode series format. The look of the show was inspired by another piece of work by its creator Simon Tofield and was adapted and advanced to fit the *Benny and Boil* characters and their environment. We are planning on using a mixture of 2D and CG, evolving out of how we want the project to look and feel, coupled against cost parameters."

When asked to comment on the animation scene in Europe, Pay sees the landscape as "a bit staid and formulaic, too conservative and not willing enough to take chances with more original material and stick with them for longer." He also believes that far too many resuscitated old franchises and repeats are

cluttering the airwaves. "The U.S. seems to be the better place to pitch creative originality as that's where the really

exciting stuff comes from," he notes, "albeit with bucket loads of dross as well!" He also expresses his frustration at the dogma that an E.U. project must have its own national terrestrial broadcaster onboard for it to be considered a runner!

The folks at Netherlands-based house Fin Film and Coconino are presenting *Brian's Brain*, an imaginative (13x7) toon about a young boy who can open up his head and let his brain out for journeys of exploration. Channeling his lead character, producer Peter Lindhout tells us, "Kids love me [Yes... he's talking as Brian's brain!] because every one of them has a blob like me. My best friend Brian and I hang around together most of the time, get involved in fantasy adventures, surreal stories, musical interventions, dogfights and a lot more." He adds, "Peter will love to hang out with all the financial guys at the Forum—he is the producer after all. One of my friends has struck it rich, after being pitched at the Forum a couple of years ago. This will be my first time at the Forum. It has a great reputation, so something good has to come of it!"

Of course, some may fear that sharing their great ideas in an open forum might encourage that most sincere form of flattery known as imitation! Others, like Tandem's Pay have developed a more fearless approach. He explains, "We have spent our entire professional creative lives being 'ripped off' and our work plagiarized by others, so one more won't make any difference... it's something we and many other creative people in our industry have had to learn to live with!" ■

To learn more about Cartoon Forum and this year's entries, visit www.cartoon-media.be.

A Multicultural Tool Time

Disney Channel's *Handy Manny* and his animated tools set out to teach younger kids how to face the daily challenges of life. **by Ramin Zahed**

Here's a note of caution to Bob the Builder: You just got some major competition from this side of the Pond. His name is Handy Manny and he's the star of Disney Channel's new animated preschool series. Created by Roger Bollen and Marilyn Sadler (*Animal Crackers*, *Zenon: Girl of the 21st Century*) and developed by Rick Gitelson of *Rugrats* fame, this show is big on multi-cultural themes and teaching kids how to face challenges and working on interpersonal relationships.

So how is *Handy Manny* different from some of the other similarly themed shows we've seen in recent years? Well, for one thing, Manny relies heavily on his team of helpers—a rowdy group of talking tools, which all have different personalities of their own. There's Pat the bumbling hammer, Turner the grouchy screwdriver (Is there another kind?), Dusty the maternal saw, Stretch the perfectionist tape measure, Rusty the scared wrench—you get the picture! We also have Kelly the friendly hardware lady and Mr. Lo-part, a neighbor who needs more help than he lets on!

"Disney was looking for a show that focused on mechanical things," recalls Bollen. "The idea of a kind-hearted handyman who has a set of talking tools simply jumped into my mind. By the time our phone conversation was over, I had agreed to throw in my idea with the others. I started to make some sketches and we wrote the descriptions very quickly ... and everybody

loved it. I have to tell you this was the quickest, smoothest program I'd ever been involved with."

Although the ethnicity of Manny was not determined in the initial stages, it was soon decided that the show was to have a nice multicultural focus. He lives in the diverse community of Sheetrock Hills. Of course the addition of Wilmer Valderrama (*That '70s Show*) as the voice of Manny really set the wheels in full motion.

"Through the development process, we made Manny a little more handsome and appealing so that he would look more heroic and appeal to both boys and girls," notes Bollen. "Now he looks a little like Desi Arnaz!"

The show's art direction relies heavily on pastel colors, and because the animators at Toronto-based shop Nelvana used Maya and Mental Ray to create its very specific toon-shaded look, the characters are separated from the backgrounds by very fine lines.

"We have a show now that's beautiful and appealing and quite unique," says Sadler. "The thing that has amazed me is that they were able to catch some of the nuances that you usually don't get with computer animation. The multicultural flavor of the show is also very appealing. The music [by acclaimed L.A.-based band Los Lobos] and the voices all work hand in hand to create something special."

Like Nickelodeon's *Dora the Explorer* and PBS's *Maya & Miguel*, each 11-minute-long segment of *Handy Manny* also teaches kids simple



Spanish words and phrases used in real-world contexts as well as informing them about latino culture and heritage.

Besides Valderrama, *Manny* also showcases the voice talent of celeb guest stars such as Shelley Morrison, Kurtwood Smith, Lance Bass, Kathie Lee Gifford, Penn Jillette, Sandra Oh, Fred Willard and Marion Ross.

The creators, however, are most pleased about the overall tone of the show. "What I'm proudest of is the way each episode has a special touching quality," admits Bollen. "It deals with real emotions. Manny is a terrific role model. In the end, you can't have anything approaching a hit TV show without having characters that are strong and distinctive—characters with whom audiences can fall in love and identify. I believe in raising the bar on human experience and not writing for the most common denominator. You can get cheap laughs with bathroom humor, but good writing deals with higher elements. Laughter is important, but it's not the most important ingredient. Passion, compassion and even sadness can be more powerful elements in animation than in live action. Disney proved that a long time ago with *Bambi*!" ■

Handy Manny premieres on Disney Channel's Playhouse Disney Saturday September 16 at 10 a.m. The show will air regularly at 10 and 10:30 a.m. on weekends and at 9 a.m. on weekdays.

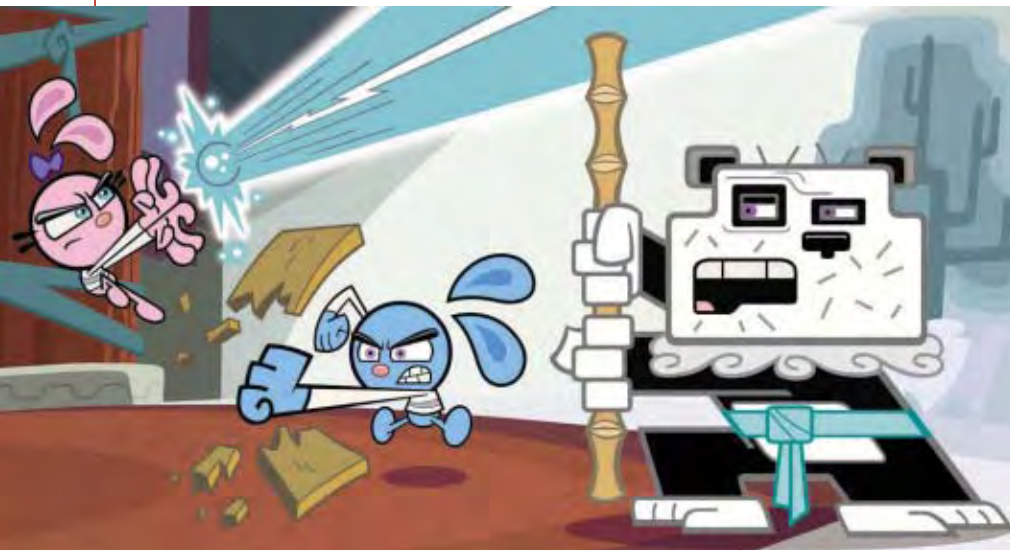


Marilyn Sadler



Roger Bollen





Steve Marmel

ily Guy would do an impact, like when Peter crashes through a table. Another thing is, we'll have that really long, awkward pause, which they do on that show and it makes me scream."

Michael Lekes, senior VP of programming for Jetix Europe, says that while Jetix Europe has been broadcasting a number of comedies, the comedy-first/action-second approach of *Yin Yang Yo!* makes it unique to the worldwide Jetix lineup. The hard part, though, is making sure the humor works on a global level. Luckily, a lot of the comic beats come from universal themes.

"The brilliant thing about *Yin Yang Yo!* is it's not a show about action and martial arts. It's actually about sibling rivalry and also, to a certain extent, sibling love," Lekes remarks. "You've got this brother and sister who really are Yin and Yang. They're complete opposites that fit together perfectly and they themselves will poke fun at the fact that they beat the hell out of each other."

Unlike the anime on Jetix outlets, *Yin Yang Yo!* has a distinct web-friendly look. That's no coincidence, according to Lekes, who says the web and emerging mobile platforms are a big consideration now. "Dare I say to the extent that when looking at original series, it might even inform the design of the show," he says. "Is the look of the characters, the line thickness and style and color palette going to play on a mobile? Is it going to pop on a PSP screen? Even the technical delivery methods are shaping creative choices now."

Above all, the makers of *Yin Yang Yo!* have worked to create a show that delivers more laughs than any other cartoon series on TV. "We're burning through three shows worth of jokes in every 11-minute episode because I want it to be entertaining the tenth time you see it," Marmel comments. "I want people to catch stuff they missed the second, third or fourth viewing." ■

The show airs on Toon Disney's Jetix block weekdays at 7:30 p.m. You can also download full episodes at www.jetix.tv.

The Tao of *Yin Yang Yo!*

Disney Kicks Comedy into the Jetix Lineup. **by Ryan Ball**

Generally known as the place to go for boys' action fare, the Jetix brand of television programming is about to get its funny bone tickled with *Yin Yang Yo!*, a new comedy series where the jokes are as rapid-fire as the punches and kicks coming from its kung-fu-fighting rabbit stars. Animated at George Elliot Animation in Canada, the series debuts in September and is getting a major push by Buena Vista International Television at this year's MIPCOM Jr. television market in Cannes.

Yin Yang Yo! is created, directed and exec produced by Bob Boyle, who has worked as a producer and art director on Nickelodeon's *The Fairly OddParents*. The new show centers on hare siblings Yin and Yang, the first brother and sister to be paired as Woo Foo Warriors. Woo Foo is a unique energy force that only a select few can control via magic or might. Under the tutelage of a cranky old panda named Master Yo, our heroes continually learn the skills they need to protect the world from such villains as Carl, the Evil Cockroach Wizard.

A major creative force behind the series is exec producer/head writer Steve Marmel, a veteran animation scribe who tells us, "This show is sort of a culmination of everything I've learned in animation. I learned how to write for animation

and how to write for characters on *Johnny Bravo*. I learned nonsensical thinking and focusing more on broad-based comedy on *Cow and Chicken*. On *The Fairly OddParents* I learned velocity and how to pick up the pace on comedy and really just go for the laugh, while *Danny Phantom* taught me how to season action with comedy."

Marmel also wrote for the short-lived Spike TV cartoon show, *This Just In*, a topical, news-related series that introduced him to the limitations and strengths of Flash animation. "For me, the strengths are acting and the fact that you can change anything you want and make it better," he explains. "So when we were talking about how to do [*Yin Yang Yo!*], it was back and forth between traditional animation and Flash. There's more control in Flash. At any step in the process you can tweak it and fix it. I love working in Flash."

It's clear that Marmel isn't just someone who draws a paycheck from animation. He's also a huge fan who works a number of toon influences into *Yin Yang Yo!* For example, comic timing in the show owes a debt to Fox's *Family Guy*. "Any time a character takes an impact, it's always a face-first fall," he notes. "Nobody falls slow, nobody stumbles. It's just hit-slam! That to me is how *Fam-*

Fall 2006 TV Preview

With all the new animated shows debuting this fall on networks and cable outlets, we need a cheat sheet to track them down and avoid confusion. So we sent our clever elves to get the skinny on some of the new season highlights. Here's what we got back!

4KIDS

Name of Show: *Chaotic*

Synopsis: Magic, adventure, and fantastic creatures abound in the multi-dimensional world of *Chaotic*—an animated series incorporating a dynamic trading card game. Each *Chaotic* card has its own unique code, which allows players to battle and trade cards in their physical and online worlds. *Chaotic: The Power is in the Code!*

Production Companies: 4Kids Entertainment/Bardel Entertainment

Premiere Date: January 2007

Name of Creator: 4Kids Entertainment

Name of Show: *Viva Piñata*

Synopsis: Welcome to the wacky, zany, anything-can-happen world of piñatas. Sure, these party animals live the sweet life on the lush



Piñata Island, but what they like best is to blast off to parties around the world to bring joy and fun to kids of all ages. *Viva Piñata*: The tag line is "Don't Beat 'Em, Join 'Em!"

Production Companies: 4Kids Entertainment/Bardel Entertainment

Premiere Date: January 2007

CARTOON NETWORK'S [adult swim]

Name of Show: *Frisky Dingo*

Synopsis: *Frisky Dingo* revolves around Killface, an evil yet under-



funded villain, and the slightly ambivalent hero Awesome-X, alter ego of billionaire Xander Crews, who worries that stopping Killface might hurt sales of the Awesome-X toys which fund his billionaire playboy lifestyle.

Production Company: 70-30 Productions

Premiere Date: Oct. 15 at 12:30 a.m.

Names of Creators: Matt Thompson and Adam Reed (*Sealab 2021*)

CARTOON NETWORK

Name of Show: *DI-GATA Defenders*

Synopsis: Four orphaned teens become the DI-GATA Defenders—

DI-GATA Defenders



powerful warriors responsible for protecting the people of Rados from the evil Order of Infinis.

Production Companies: Nelvana Limited / Luxanimation.

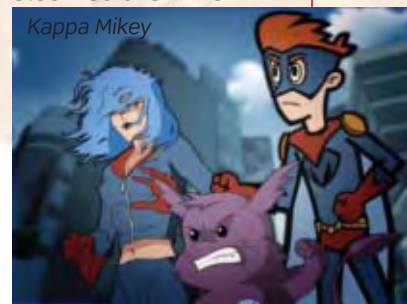
Premiere Date: CINETOON sneak preview Aug. 5 at 5 p.m. Regular timeslot begins Sept. 3 at 7 p.m.

Name of Creator: Greg Collinson

Name of Show: *Kappa Mikey*

Synopsis: An unemployed American actor wins a spot on a once top-rated Japanese TV show. It's East meets West when an all-anime world welcomes the Ameri-

can-styled, Flash-animated *Mikey*. **Production Companies:**



Viacom/ Animation Collective
Premiered: Aug. 28 at 7:30 p.m. airs Mon., Tues. and Wed. at 7:30 p.m.

Name of Creator: Larry Schwarz

Name of Show: *Ellen's Acres*

Synopsis: *Ellen's Acres* is a preschool comedy about a five-year-old girl named Ellen who lives in her parents' hotel and has amazing adventures. There's not a lot to do at Emerald Acres Hotel, but



Ellen's Acres

Ellen's got a big imagination... Actually, it's totally enormous!

Production Company: Animation Collective

Premiere Date: Oct. 16

Name of Creator: Acquired from Animation Collective

Name of Show: *Foster's Home for Imaginary Friends: Good Wilt Hunting*

Synopsis: After once again having no visitor at the Foster's Creator Reunion Picnic, Wilt sets out in hope of reuniting with his long-lost creator. Uncertain as to why Wilt left, the Foster's gang set out to find him, unraveling his mysterious past along the way in this one-hour movie.

Production Company: Cartoon Network Studios

Premiere Date: Nov. 24 at 7 p.m.

Name of Creator: Craig McCracken

Name of Show: *Class of 3000*

Synopsis: *Class of 3000* focuses on the diverse and talented students of the prestigious Westley School of the Performing Arts whose lives change when Sunny



Class of 3000

Bridges (voiced by André Benjamin), an international superstar/Westley alum-

nus, returns looking for something he lost.

Production Companies: Cartoon Network Studios/Tom Lynch Co. /

Moxie

Premiere Date: Nov. 2006

Names of Creators: André Benjamin (André 3000 of OutKast), Tom Lynch (*Romeo!*) and Patric M. Verdone (*Futurama*, *The Critic* and *Pinky and the Brain*)

COMEDY CENTRAL

Name of Show: *Freak Show*

Synopsis: *Freak Show* chronicles the adventures and misadventures of the Freak Squad, a band of freaks secretly employed by the U.S. government. When the Squad is not busy undertaking low-priority missions for the Pen-



tagon, they retreat to their alternate lives as performers in America's last independently owned traveling

freak show.

Production Company: Comedy Central

Premiere Date: Oct. 4 at 10:30 p.m.

Names of Creators: David Cross (*Arrested Development*, *Mr. Show*) and H. Jon Benjamin (*Dr. Katz: Professional Therapist*, *Home Movies*)

DIC Entertainment / KOL

Name of Show: *Horseland*

Synopsis: *Horseland* is set in the greatest stable ever where kids and their amazing talking horses compete and have adventures. Each episode features themes that deal with issues such as com-



Horseland

passion, honesty and cooperation—both human and equine.

Production Companies: DIC Entertainment/KOL (AOL's online kids' destination)

Premiere Date: Sept. 16

Name of Creator: DIC Entertainment; based on the web community www.horseland.com

DISCOVERY KIDS

Name of Show: *Growing Up Creepie*

Synopsis: Creepie Creecher is "different" from other kids, and she's more than a little nervous about going to school for the first time. Left as a baby on the doorstep of Dweezold Mansion to be raised by a loving family of bugs, Creepie must now learn to survive in the outside world.

Production Companies: Taffy Entertainment/Discovery Kids/DAG/Telegael

Premiere Date: Sept. 9 at 7:30 p.m.

Executive Producers: Carin Greenberg Baker, Bill Schultz, Mike Young and Liz Young; for Discovery Kids: Jim Rapsas, Melinda Toporoff and Marjorie Kaplan

Name of Show: *Bigfoot Presents: Meteor and the Mighty Monster Trucks*

Synopsis: Semi-retired monster truck champion Bigfoot



Bigfoot Presents: Meteor and the Mighty Monster Truck



has returned to his hometown of Crashington Park, but things sure have changed! His son's new best friend is Meteor, a young moon-buggy chock full of space-age gadgets, who hopes one day to be as famous as Bigfoot.

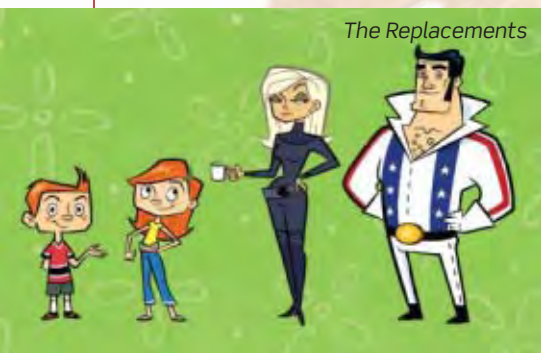
Production Company: Discovery Kids

Premiere Date: Sept. 25 at 10:30 a.m. during the "Ready, Set, Learn!" preschool block. Premieres on TLC Oct. 2 at 8 a.m.

DISNEY CHANNEL/TOON DISNEY

Name of Show: *The Replacements*

Synopsis: In the world of *The Replacements*, tween siblings Riley and Todd can replace any adult in their lives by making a simple call to the Fleemco company, resulting



in hilarious unforeseen consequences.

Production Company: Walt Disney Television Animation

Premiere Date: Sneak preview Sept. 8 (9:00/9:30 p.m. ET/PT)
Regular timeslot begins Sept. 9 (8:00/8:30 p.m. ET/PT)

Name of Creator: Dan

Santat; Jack Thomas is executive producer.

JETIX

Name of Show: *Yin Yang Yo!*

Synopsis: *Yin Yang Yo!* follows the antics of hyper-kinetic tween rabbits Yin and Yang, who must put aside their sibling rivalry to learn the mystical martial art of



Woo Foo, the energy that allows Yin and Yang to power up and defeat enemies ten times stronger than themselves.

Production Companies: Jetix Animation Concepts / Walt Disney Television Animation

Premiere Date: Sept. 4 (Labor Day Marathon, 6 a.m. to midnight)
Regular timeslot begins Sept. 5 (7:30/8:00 p.m. ET/PT) on Toon Disney during Jetix

Executive Producers: Bob Boyle and Steve Marmel

Name of Show: *Pucca*

Synopsis: *Pucca* is a young girl in single-minded pursuit of her true love, Garu. Unfortunately, Garu is only interested in becoming a ninja, making it *Pucca's* sole mission to win his heart, either by her martial arts expertise or her girlish charms.

Production Company: Studio B Productions in association with Jetix Europe

Premiere Date: Sept. 18 (7:00/7:30 p.m. ET/PT)
Regular timeslot begins Sept. 25



(8:30/9:00 p.m. ET/PT) on Toon Disney during Jetix.

Name of Creator: Boo Kyoung Kim.
Executive producers are Chris Bartleman and Blair Peters (Studio B Productions) and Michael Lekes

Name of Show: *Legend of the Dragon*

Synopsis: When the temple guardian dies, a new Golden Dragon must be chosen between twins, a brother and sister born in the Year of the Dragon. One will defend the

temple; the other is lured to join the lord of the darkest Yin, and a legend shall be born—*The Legend of the Dragon*.

Production Company: BKN International AG

Premiere Date: Oct. 7 on Disney / Jetix, showing Monday-Friday between 7-8 a.m., plus on Saturday and Sunday between 8 a.m.-12 noon.

Name of Creator: Rick Ungar



KIDS' WB!

Name of Show: *Legion of Super Heroes*



Synopsis: One thousand years from now, a young Superman will inspire a group of emerging super heroes from the 31st century to

band together to defend the rights of all free worlds and uphold the laws of the United Planets. That is, if they don't kill each other first.

Production Company: Warner Bros. Animation

Premiere Date: Sept. 23

Executive Producer: Sander Schwartz

Name of Show: *Monster Allergy*



Synopsis: Due to his allergies, 12-year-old Zick discovers he has the ability to see the invisible supernatural monsters that live among us. Aided by his neighbor and his talking cat, Zick learns to harness his powers in hope of becoming a Monster Tamer. Based on popular comic books.

Production Company: Rainbow S.P.A.

Premiere Date: Sept. 23

Name of Show: *Shaggy & Scooby-Doo Get A Clue!*



Synopsis: Ruh-roh! Everyone's favorite quivering sleuths are back in a new adventure: Shaggy inherits a fortune from his Uncle Albert, moves with Scooby into his newly be-

queathed mansion and uncovers an evil plot to steal his late uncle's invention.

Production Com-

pany: Warner Bros. Animation

Premiere Date: Sept. 23

Executive Producer: Sander Schwartz

Name of Show: *Spider Riders*

Synopsis: Hunter Steele, a typical 11-year-old boy, accidentally discovers the mystical land of Arachna, where by using a magical manacle he teams up with the Spider Riders- skilled fighters who defend Arachna with the help of their 10-foot Battle Spiders.

Production Company: Cookie Jar Entertainment

Premiere Date: Sept. 23

Name of Show: *Tom and Jerry Tales*

Synopsis: Tom and Jerry return to basics, chasing each other in an all-new series of hilarious cartoon shorts. With endless rivalry and



slapstick gags, this cat-and-mouse comedy team creates over-the-top mayhem

and laugh-out-loud memories.

Production Company: Warner Bros. Animation

Premiere Date: Sept. 23

Executive Producer: Sander Schwartz

NBC/ Telemundo's qubo Block

Name of Show: *Dragon*

Synopsis: A stop-motion series for preschoolers about a kindhearted blue dragon named Dragon. Dragon is friendly and helpful, but tends to see things from a much



different perspective than

most of us--and that's when the fun begins!

Production Company: Scholastic

Premiere Date: Sept. 9 at 10:30 a.m. on NBC, 8:30 a.m. on Telemundo; Sept. 15 at 3:30 p.m. on i Network

Name of Creator: Based on the books by Dav Pilkey

Name of Show: *Jane and the Dragon*

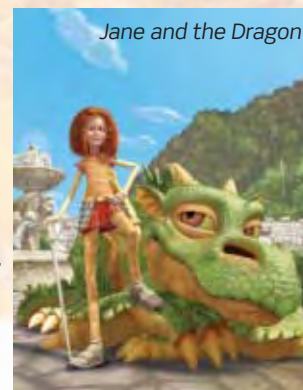
Synopsis: Jane is a middle-class, medieval girl who lives in the Royal Court with her family. Instead of following tradition and becoming a Lady-in-Waiting, she trains as a Knight and has amazing adventures

alongside her best friend,

a giant green Dragon!

Production Company:

Nelvana Ltd./ Weta



Premiere Date: Sept. 9 at 12 p.m. on NBC, Sept. 10 at 8:30 a.m. on Telemundo, Sept. 15 at 5 p.m. on i Network

Directed by: Mike Fallows

Name of Show: *Jacob Two-Two*

Synopsis: As the youngest member of a large family, Jacob has to



say things twice so he can be heard. Still, there are those who notice him when he inadvertently



lands himself in adventures that involve mysterious neighbors, international spies, and villains!

Production Company: Nelvana Ltd.

Premiere Date: Sept. 9 at 12:30 p.m. on NBC, Sept. 10 at 9 a.m. on Telemundo, Sept. 15 at 5:30 p.m. on i Network

Name of Creator: Based on books by Mordecai Richler; directed by Jamie Whitney.

Name of Show: *VeggieTales Presents: 3-2-1 Penguins! and LarryBoy Adventures*

Synopsis: Two fun-filled alternating animated adventures: *3-2-1 Penguins!* tells the story of two kids and four out-of-this-world penguins exploring the galaxy. *LarryBoy*, follows the caped cucumber and his alter-ego Larry as he defends decency and guards goodness everywhere.

Production Company: Classic Media/Big Idea

Premiere Date: Sept. 9 at 11 a.m. on NBC, 9 a.m. on Telemundo; Sept. 15 at 4 p.m. on i Network

NICKELODEON

Name of Show: *Avatar: The Last Airbender- The Secret of the Fire Nation* (1 hour movie)

Synopsis: Prevented from taking the "easy way" into Ba Sing Se, the kids must escort a family of refugees there through the



deadly Serpent's Pass. Aang and the others must stop a colossal invention from the Fire Nation before it destroys the great wall that protects the city from invasion.

Production Company: Nickelodeon at Nicktoons Studios

Premiere Date: Sept. 15 at 8 p.m.

Names of Creators: Michael DiMartino and Bryan Konietzko

Name of Show: *SpongeBob SquarePants: Best Day Ever!* (Marathon event and special)



Synopsis: In honor of the happy-go-lucky sponge, Nickelodeon will celebrate a SpongeBob event titled *Best Day Ever!* (hosted by Patchy the Pirate) which will feature a 24-

hour SpongeBob marathon culminating with a *Best Day Ever!* original special.

Production Companies: Nickelodeon's Nicktoons Studios

Premiere Date: Nov. 9 at 8 p.m. to Nov. 10 at 8 p.m.

Name of Creator: Stephen Hillenburg

Noggin/ Nick Jr.

Name of Show: *Wow! Wow! Wubbzy!*

Synopsis: Explore the wacky world of Wuzzleburg on *Wow! Wow! Wubbzy!*, a new, whimsical preschool comedy starring three offbeat friends who use cooperation, creativity and humor to solve everyday kid problems.

Production Companies: Bolder Media for Boys and Girls / IDT En-



tertainment.

Premiere Date: Aug. 28 at 11 a.m. on Nick Jr. and NOGGIN

Name of Creator: Bob Boyle

PBS KIDS

Name of Show: *Curious George*

Synopsis: Since 1941, children have delighted in the (mis-)adventures of *Curious George* in the best-selling book series. Now, hot on the heels of his successful big screen debut, *Curious George* swings onto television in this educational new pre-school series.



Production Companies: Imagine Entertainment/WGBH Boston / Universal Studios Family Productions

Premiere Date: Sept. 4 on PBS Kid's new interactive Pre-school Block.

Executive Producers: Carol Greenwald (WGBH) and Ellen Cockrill (Universal); based on the best-selling books by Margret and H.A. Rey

—Compiled by Mercedes Milligan



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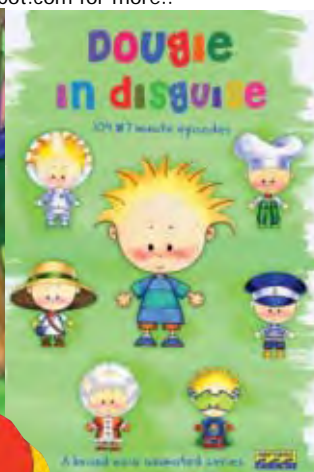
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Dogtanian and the
Three Muskehounds



King Arthur's Disasters

Viva Piñata



Toons Beyond Borders

While some international companies are looking at co-production deals to launch their new slate, many hope for a cash windfall in home-grown animated projects. **by Chris Grove**

When the Walt Disney Company even expresses an interest in buying your company, you know you've arrived. So it was a matter of some intrigue when the Mouse House announced earlier this summer that it had bought Mumbai-based UTV Software Communications' kids entertainment channel Hungama TV for \$30.5 million.

"It will allow Disney to fortify its already strong presence in the Indian animation market," said Rich Ross, president of Disney Channel Worldwide, at the time. Under the terms of the deal, Disney reportedly acquired a 15% equity stake in UTV itself. The move by Disney is "significant" says one toon exec, and it may lead his company to find similar ways to get boots on the ground in India.

Another wholly owned subsidiary of UTV is UTV Toons, which started as a work-for-hire facility and is now in the process of migrating to creating, producing and co-producing its own shows. "There's such a wealth of IT expertise in India that we think we're only a year behind our Southeast Asian counterparts in 3D television and film production," UTV CEO and founder Ronnie Screwvala told

Animation Magazine earlier this year.

Is the Disney deal a sign of the times? Does it mean the Indian animation market has reached a new level of maturation and is primed for true co-production deals and content creation for worldwide markets? In a word: Yes. "India is surging as a source of programming," says Brian Lacey, executive vice president international for 4Kids. But it's only the beginning.

A number of companies contacted for this article are heading that way, but they're not there yet. Canadian animation house Decode Entertainment reports, for example, that the company is in the "initial stages" of working out co-prod deals in India, Korea and other parts of Asia, but was not in a position to give more details at press time. Similarly, execs at Barcelona-based Neptuno Films say their company is not venturing into co-prod deals in India/Asia just yet. "Despite the segmentation of the market and lower fees, we're still doing fine producing all our shows in Spain," says Roberto Mitrani, director of international operations. Founded 15 years ago by Cristina Brandner and Josep Viciano, Neptuno-originated series

Connie the Cow, Dougie in Disguise, Tork, The Ugly Duckling and others are distributed in territories worldwide. While a recently concluded trade agreement between Spain and Canada may lead to Canuck co-prod deals, Mitrani says as far as the Far East is concerned: "We don't need to go there. At least not now."

For its wholly-owned shows, Neptuno raises production costs partnering with TV3 or RTVE and through pre-sales. The company does take equity positions in shows that outside broadcasters bring to Neptuno. Neptuno has, for example, a very successful co-prod partner in London-based Zenith Entertainment, whose King Arthur's Disasters is now in its second season. "Because of ability to produce several series at the same time, we're expanding our co-production deals with partners who bring properties to us," says Mitrani. In such cases, Neptuno provides gap financing in exchange for an equity position in the show.

Another Spanish company, BRB Internacional, has had many deals with Asian partners and plans on more. BRB started as a licensing/merchandising company. After working for a number of years for majors such as Warner Bros., MGM and others, company execs decided in 1979 to start creating and producing their own content for the local and European market. "We already knew the customers and the broadcasters," says Carlos Biern,

BRB's head of co-productions. "So, we thought: Why not try?"

Programs such as *Dogtanian and the Three Muskehounds*, *Around the World with Willy Fog* and *The World of David the Gnome* found big audiences in Spain, the U.K., France and Italy. Currently all of BRB's 30 series are national or international co-productions. In the early going, BRB's main co-prod partners were local (TVE, TV Catalunya, Antena 3 and Tele 5). But BRB was also one of the first European co-producers to work with Japanese studios, beginning in the 1980s with Nippon Animation.

BRB's more recent co-prod deals include *Iron Kid* with Korean animation studio Daiwon and DesignStorm. Japanese Animation Distributor Manga Entertainment has licensed the series for television broadcast, DVD distribution and merchandising in the U.S., Canada, Mexico, Australia and New Zealand. Daiwon retains the same rights in Asia while BRB has European and Latin American distribution rights. *Iron Kid* debuted in Asia this spring and is set for launch in the U.S. this fall. Created by Nicole Dubuc (*Jackie Chan Adventures*, *Dragontales*),

ters with CG artistic qualities. As for the much-ballyhooed cost-savings producers can realize animating in the Indian subcontinent? "For BRB it's primarily important to work with a co-producer that has a great director and team attached," Biern says. "We look for the best talent wherever they are. It's not a monetary question any longer but a question of creating a great result."

For its part, 4Kids has had a long tradition of being associated with Asian animation companies. *Yu-Gi-Oh!* and *Pokémon*, of course, originated in Japan. 4Kids adapted, edited and voiced the two series for English-speaking territories but had no part in the animation process. *Mutant Ninja Turtles*, meanwhile, was produced in Korea. For at least two of its new series, *Chaotic* and *Viva Piñata*, 4Kids is co-producing with Canadian partners. Nothing on the company's current schedule foreshadows any new Asia/India co-production pacts. "India is still a new frontier for animation," says Lacey. "So questions of capabilities, scheduling and quality are still in the forefront." Nonetheless, he adds, 4Kids is looking into ways to make some future

Film Maker, Sav! The World Productions, France 3 and Super RTL are among the co-production partners.)

"Co-productions with Asian and Indian companies are rare for Jetix Europe," says Michael Lokes, senior vice president programming, Jetix Europe. "As (it is) for most of our studio and broadcaster partners." The majority of Jetix's Asian content, to date, has been almost entirely acquisition titles. In part, Lokes says, this is due to the Japanese model of production, which has little or no need for foreign investment to be financially viable. "The domestic sponsorship partners provide adequate financing, and the size of their market adequate revenue. In addition, the speed with which they generally proceed from development to delivery precludes third party editorial involvement."

Which happens to be a prerequisite for Jetix Europe, to ensure suitability of the content for the broadcaster's audience.

"As a result, Japanese studios enjoy a rare level of artistic autonomy in the animation field, which can make true creative partnerships difficult." So, in this case, the French *Oban Star-Racers* creators were physically based in the Tokyo studio for two years, learned Japanese and forged a unique, integral team with the local creatives. The series debuts this fall in European territories. "We regard this as a true coming-of-age milestone for our channels," Lokes says. ■



Brian Lacey



Carlos Biern



Michael Lokes



Rich Ross



Roberto Mitrani

"We look for the best talent wherever they are... it's not a monetary question any longer, but a question of creating a great result."

—Carlos Biern, Spanish toon house BRB's head of co-productions

Ben Townsend, (*Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*) and Javier Martínez (*Medal of Honor*), the CG-animated show takes place in the robot year of 617, after the first Robot World War for mankind has broken out. "It's a great example of the power of combining European directing and executive production, American writing and the best of Korean CG animation directing," says Biern. "It has been great to see how these three markets, with their specific strengths, work together in a big-concept show."

And there'll be more co-prods in the region for BRB. Biern and others say Korean and Indian companies are starting to get great results creating believable charac-

aggressive moves in India with respect to co-prods and licensing deals.

For the record, the Indian animation industry logged \$205 million in revenues in 2005, according to figures from the National Association of Software and Services Companies, a leading Indian IT trade group. NASSCOM predicts that figure will close on \$1 billion by 2010. A figure that Screwvalla calls "overly dramatic."

While an Indian co-production deal is also not in the near-term plans for Jetix Europe, the company recently made a big move with the Japanese co-prod *Oban Star-Racers*. It's the first time Jetix has had a co-production deal with, in this case, Japanese companies. (Bandai Visual, Hal

London Calling All Toys

Brand Licensing draws record number of entertainment and licensing outfits to the city's Olympia venue.

According to the latest NPD License Tracker figures, the sales of licensed kids' products (age 1-14) rose by 2% in the first half of 2005, bringing in the total value of the market for this period to 758 million pounds (1.43 billion dollars) in the U.K. That's why it's not surprising to see the phenomenal growth of London's annual Brand Licensing Show in the past few years.

This year's event, which takes place at Olympia in London on Oct. 4 and 5 promises to be another popular way for retailers, licensing agents and promotional marketers to explore new licensing options for the next couple of years.

Jessica Blue, the show's event director, tells us there will be a range of new and innovative visitor attractions designed to bring brands and properties to life this year. "We are introducing the Screening Suite, 'where films become brands,' a purpose-built cinema situated inside Olympia," says Blue. "Studio giants will be using the suite to present exclusive invitation-only screenings, teasers, trailers and licensing opportunities for forthcoming movie properties."

Another added attraction this year is the live events stage, where attendees can take in apparel showcases, character appearances, demonstrations and more. "The success of last year's Advice Center has secured its return with industry pros on hand to answer any questions," adds Blue. "And don't forget to book your place at the popular seminar and workshop program. You can buy tickets

and see the full schedule online. Many of last year's programs sold out, so it's advisable to book early!"

As far as trends in the licensing world are concerned, Blue says the U.K. has become an extremely strong market for kids' animation. "There is, however,



more animation made for niche markets now, such as BBC's *Charlie and Lola* and ITV's *Sketch Show*. The industry wants more comedy at the moment, but the challenge for the licensing industry is bringing comedy into the products related to those shows." The good news is that the sector seems to show no signs of slowing down. "We saw 70 new exhibitors at last year's Brand Licensing, many of whom were entering the licensing world for the first time and this year we expect a similar number. More and more companies are waking up to the lucrative opportunities that licensing provides."

By the way, Blue tells us that the U.K.'s top licenses at retail (Jan.-June 2005) were Winnie the Pooh, Barbie, Disney Princesses, Bratz, Spider-Man and Star Wars. Looks like our friends across the pond have very similar tastes when it comes to toys and tie-ins!

For more info, visit www.brandlicensing.com.

Wear Your CN Love on Your Sleeve

Besides catching them on the small screen, kids can see a lot more of **Ben 10** and **The Powerpuff Girls** in the months ahead. Cartoon Network Enterprises recently struck three new licensing agreements that will see new apparel lines based on the hit animated shows.

Olaes Design and Marketing (ODM) and SGFootwear will respectively produce t-shirts and shoes inspired by the new hit action-adventure series, *Ben 10*. Meanwhile, Mighty Fine will develop juniors' and tweens' fashions based on long-standing favorite, *The Powerpuff Girls*.

ODM, which specializes in the young men's and boys' market, will develop both long- and short-sleeved t-shirts and sweatshirts featuring images of the *Ben 10* alien heroes. The product line will be available in mid-tier and department stores beginning this fall. Slated to arrive at retail nationwide in the spring of 2007, SGFootwear's *Ben 10* line will range from athletic shoes to flip-flops. At the same time, the folks at Mighty Fine (*French Kitty*, *Ruby Gloom*) have signed a multi-year deal

to develop a line of knit tops, t-shirts and fleece tops featuring *The Powerpuff Girls* characters Blossom, Bubbles and Buttercup, as well as icons and logos. The line will sport a retro edge and will be sold through specialty and

boutique stores as well as upscale department stores beginning this fall, with prices ranging from \$25 to \$50. We think Ben and the Girls are going to take over *Fashion Runway* next season.



DigiKidz Nets Spider-Man for DVD

Florida-based **DigiKidz Inc.** has licensed Marvel's **Spider-Man** property to make personalized, animated DVDs in which kids can star as the friendly neighborhood web slinger. Parents will be able to go to www.digikidz.com to order their tailor-made DVD adventures, which will be customized by DigiKidz designers. A distribution deal is in the works will involve major retail outlets, according to the company.

DigiKidz has been marketing various personalized kids' products since 2004. The company now has a proprietary line of 12 personalized animated video adventure stories branded "U.R. The Star." Main characters in the cartoons have been animated with a white space where their faces should be so that photos of kids' faces can be inserted. Fans of FOX's *The Simpsons* may recall an episode where Homer had a similar type of video made for Lisa. The Spider-Man licensing deal with Marvel covers U.S. rights. Each DVD offered on the site costs \$29.95. In addition to the personalized DVDs, DigiKids has produced its first educational entertainment DVD for toddlers.



Potter Conjures Up New Partner

The new year will find Harry Potter joining forces with a new master toy license. Warner Bros. Consumer Products has signed Hillside, N.J.-based collectibles maker **NECA Inc** to handle the master toy license

for the boy wizard along with gift and specialty products rights. The outfit's rights extend

from North America through Latin America and the Asia Pacific countries and begin in 2007 when Mattel's master toy license for the property expires. The first NECA products are expected to materialize in stores in time for the July 13 release of the latest **Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix**. Mattel will reportedly continue to market its Scene It? Harry Potter DVD game, and new '07 version will be available next year. In what some see as biting the wand that feeds you, Mattel has blamed its Harry Potter tie-ins for its less-than-impressive overall sales in the past few years.



Art of the Beholder

We know the arrival of fall can be a heart-breaking time for those of us who hate to say good-bye to the summer. Well, there are things you can do to cheer yourself up. Besides reading about the latest career mishaps of our favorite insane celebrities, we like to visit **Acme Archives**, the Burbank-based fine art publisher for studios such as Fox, Cartoon Network, LucasFilm and Paramount. You can find all kinds of amazing pieces connected to toons such as *The Simpsons*, *Family Guy* and *Clone Wars* to *SpongeBob SquarePants* and *Ice Age 2*. A limited edited **Family Guy Stewie Character Key** will cost you about \$25, while a framed *Star Wars: Shadow of the Sith* Frame Giclee will set you back \$180. Many of us here at the magazine are counting the days until the **Futurama Attack! Bender vs Zoidberg** piece is released in September. Priced at \$225, it's the kind of glorious object that separates the casual fans from the die-hard devotees of an art form. (We hear it's worth even a lot more on Zoidberg's home planet of Decapod 10.) For more info visit www.acmearchives.direct.



LICENSING

Hot Stuff

The following are some of the most popular items bought on the toy and collective website, entertainmentearth.com last month:

- V for Vendetta Mask (Rubies, \$9.95)
- Hellboy Comic Figure: Hellboy (Mezco, \$14.99)
- Star Wars Transformers Delux Millennium Falcon (Hasbro, \$45.99)
- Battlestar Galactica Cylon Commander (RC2, \$14.99)
- Simpsons Brad Goodman and Lionel Hutz Figure (Playmates, 16.99; sale: \$1.50)
- Star Trek Deana Troi Action Figure (Diamond Select, \$14.99)
- Duck Dodgers Marvin the Martian Vinyl Figure (Funco, \$12.99)
- Star Wars Count Dooku Electronic Lightsaber (Hasbro, \$21.99)
- Lord of the Rings Gollum Action Figure (Toy Biz, \$9.99; sale: \$1.50)
- Pirates 2 Jack Sparrow Head Knocker (NECA, \$16.99)

Source: www.entertainmentearth.com, 8/25/06





Branching Out

Director Neil LaBute learns how to deliver digital bees for his new thriller, *The Wicker Man*. by Ron Magid

A lot can happen in 26 years. Take, for example the case of the 1980 sci-fi feature *The Wicker Man*, the inspiration behind director Neil LaBute's remake, which opens in theaters this month. The original was a Scottish thriller about an English policeman's search for a missing girl held hostage by a pagan island community, while the new version is a contemporary thriller about a California highway patrolman seeking a missing girl in a pagan cult based on an island off the New England Coast.

LaBute, whose sexually charged films

include *Your Friends and Neighbors* and *Nurse Betty*, has taken *The Wicker Man* out of the realm of Christianity vs. paganism. "The concerns are arguably an even older conflict than religion itself," laughs LaBute, who saw the original in 1980. "I thought it was such a strange picture—singular and effective. I didn't think I could make it better so much as I could make it different. Coming from a theater background, where there are multiple productions of your own work, or *Hamlet*, it was not a strange idea for me to take my shot.

Even those who know [the original] will find that the journey takes them to roughly the same place, but it's a very different road they travel to get there."

This time, the pagan Summerisle is located off the New England coast, and its crop, sustained by human sacrifice, is honey, which fueled a number of critical changes, starting with transforming the original's bacchanalian patriarchy into a more sinister goddess cult. "Changing the central industry of the island from apples to honey also [suggested] the

motif of a colony, the queen bee, the female workers and the male drones, but it also became much more dangerous," LaBute says. "There's not many people that have had a run in with an apple, but the idea of bees—and someone who's allergic to them—makes every step potentially dangerous."

When Nicolas Cage's character accidentally stumbles into the midst of a bee field, he finds himself being chased and stung—an interesting metaphor for LaBute's first major encounter with visual effects. Fortunately, the director's longtime editor, Joel Plotch, who cut nearly all of LaBute's films had an extensive effects background, having run his own shops—JP Studio, F-Stop Studio and Third Element Films—creating imagery for commercials and music videos for 15 years prior to teaming up with LaBute.

"When we started shooting, there was no visual effects supervisor, so I broke down the script," Plotch recalls. "As we were starting to shoot visual effects sequences, I was asking, 'Is anyone taking notes on lenses? Putting silver and white balls in there so we can get lighting?' and they were like, 'What?' At that point, we brought on Ralph Maiers to oversee the more intense visual effects on set."

Three FX houses were hired to tackle

cord time: about 60 visual effects were in process before we locked picture at the end of May, and the additional 110 were done in about six weeks."

The key image of Cage trapped in the burning Wicker Man was achieved almost entirely practically using a full-scale mockup of just the head and

white screens but found the live insects didn't take direction well. "They weren't choreographed at all, their movements were random," he says.

The solution was to have Lava animate the bees—but keep them at a real-world distance. "Nick runs through a bee field and runs into one of the skeps (man-made beehives) and all of a sudden the bees start following him and he's flying through the field," Plotch says. "As for keeping the animation real, it's about their movement and their size. We sent a bunch of shots back because the bees were way too big, or way too blurry, because we didn't have lens information for the plates. It took a while—we were really up against the wire to

get [the bees] to work. Once we figured that out, the key was creating a far background, background, middle ground, middle foreground and foreground so that it felt like the bees were actually in the space. There were no real close-ups, all the close shots were done practically."

Plotch's editorial background helped shape the scene and imbue Cage's flight with panicked intensity. "The tension came from the editing," he stresses. "We edited the scene so it was intense, then Lava added their animated bees. When we watched our first composite print with a bunch of people who hadn't seen the movie, absolutely none of them thought the bees were effects shots—they didn't think there were any effects shots in the whole movie. It all looks practical."

Which is exactly what LaBute had hoped the cinematic gods of Summerisle would provide: "That sequence has really been manipulated by artists to create something that looks very real and yet the bees are exactly where we want them for the greatest effect," he says. "Now I'm a thorough believer in using effects." ■

Warner Bros.' *The Wicker Man* is currently playing in theaters nationwide.



shoulders shot outdoors over five days against the blue skies of Vancouver. While the full Wicker Man was burned for real, Pac Title supplied additional digital fire and smoke and a menagerie of 3D animals. "Since we burned the thing, rather than making dramatic or artistic choices, we were just trying to match everything and make it seem like part of a whole," says LaBute, who had an advantage over the original film's director, Robin Hardy, who had to shoot everything practically—LaBute could separate the fire and smoke elements if necessary, then add them later, so he could concentrate on getting the best performance from his

"Changing the central industry of the island from apples to honey [suggested] the motif of a colony, the queen bee, the female workers and the male drones—but it also became much more dangerous."

—Director Neil LaBute

The Wicker Man's modest 170 visual effects shots. Says Plotch, "Lava did all the bees, Worldwide FX did rig removal, matting, crowd enhancements; and Pacific Title & Art Studio a.k.a. Pac Title enhanced the project with additional fire and sky replacements and handled all the opticals. We finished the film in re-

star. "It was great to have that kind of control over the performance side of it."

The bees arguably presented the biggest challenge for LaBute, who insisted on real world accuracy. Plotch created rough composites on Avid using live bees shot against black, blue and



Flight of Fancy: Director Michel Gondry and his art director Pierre Pell opted to visualize the lead character's dream world through stop-motion animation because of the medium's ethereal, poetic qualities.



Weird Science

Stop-motion gets surreal in Michel Gondry's *The Science of Sleep*. **by Ryan Ball**

Before nabbing an Oscar for co-writing (with Charlie Kaufman) the hit indie feature *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, which he also directed, filmmaker Michel Gondry was making animated music videos for the likes of Bjork, the White Stripes and Steriogram. His second feature, *The Science of Sleep*, marks a return to those roots as he employs stop-motion animation to create the magical and sometimes disturbing world that exists in a young man's slumbering imagination.

A bittersweet fable, *The Science of Sleep* (*La Science des rêves*) stars Gael García Bernal (*Motorcycle Diaries*) as Stéphane, who has come from Mexico to start a new life with his mother in Paris. He makes quick friends with a neighbor named Stéphanie, played by Charlotte Gainsbourg (*Jane Eyre*), and sparks a romance that is complicated

by his inability to separate his dreams from his waking life. In his sleep, Stéphane hosts his own TV show, flies above an animated cardboard city and communes with charming creatures that resemble arts & crafts projects come to life.

The animation took about three

plodes, covering the cardboard city with lava. Rather than compositing the various elements in post, Pell and crew devised a set-up that would make Ray Harryhausen proud.

"We had the flat ground where we had the houses and the volcano when it was flat. Then behind that we had a mirror that was at a 45-degree angle, and then above all of this we had a clear piece of glass and behind everything was the sky," Pell explains. "All the houses and the volcano were animated with wires coming up from the ground and all the [volcanic debris] in

"To film the city the way Gondry wanted to have it in the dreams could only be done in stop-motion animation, mainly because it's not perfect. If we did it in 3D [CG], it would probably be pretty but it wouldn't be poetic."

—Pierre Pell, *The Science of Sleep's* art director

months to complete. Production designer Pierre Pell, who also helped out with the animation, tells us the most difficult shot involves a volcano that emerges from the ground and ex-

the sky was on the piece of clear glass above it and it was reflecting in the mirror. That's how we got everything in one shot."

After the city is destroyed, we see it



being built back up by magical forces. "To film the city the way [Gondry] wanted to have it in the dreams where the city is being rebuilt, it could only be done in stop-motion animation, mainly because it's not perfect," says Pell. "If we did it in 3D, it would probably be pretty but it wouldn't be poetic."

The film features between 70 and 80 shots involving animation, which is a lot for a character-driven, live-action production. Gondry assembled a small crew of artists and technicians who spent roughly three months realizing the director's unique vision.

"There were like 10 of us who went to the South of France to this barn in the forest," says Pell. "There was a place where they used to cut wood in the back, so it was full of wood and objects all over the place and we changed this place into an animation studio and workshop. All the time we were doing this film we were laughing at how we were working because if anyone who's used to working on an animated film



would have come and seen us, they wouldn't have understood how we could do it because it was a total mess."

The animated characters in the film include a little bluebird, a typewriter with spider-like appendages and puppet versions of Stéphane and Stéphanie. But the stop-mo effect viewers are likely to respond to the most is Pony Boy, a stuffed animal that Stéphane brings to life through some clever mechanical engineering. One of the more sophisticated puppets, it had a ball-and-socket armature underneath its cloth exterior while other characters were and props were animated with a combination of ball-and-socket joints, aluminum wire and whatever

else happened to be handy.

"It was a mix of a lot of things because I don't think any of us worked in a traditional way," Pell remarks. "And since we were doing everything out in the middle of nowhere, if we had to buy anything, we had to drive like two or three hours, so we had to rely on what was around us."

The improvisation that took place in that barn studio no doubt contributed greatly to the energy and sense of experimentation that comes across on the screen. Now that CG animation has taken on the task of making effects believable, stop-motion has been set free to be its own thing, and in the case of *The Science of Sleep*, it has made a truly unique film all the more special.

Gondry is currently wrapping up production on the Jack Black comedy *Be Kind Rewind*, and is slated to direct the sci-fi comedy *Master of Space and Time*, based on the novel by Rudy Rucker. ■

The Science of Sleep will be released in North America by Warner Independent Pictures on Sept. 15



Cause & Effect

Producing Purrfect Speech Patterns

How the folks at Pittsburgh's Animal and Boston's Brickyard helped make dozens of cats yack in unison.
by Barbara Robertson

How do you convince 32 cats to say, "meow meow" on cue? You send them to Pittsburgh. There, at the visual effects house aptly named Animal, co-founders Jim Kreitzburg and Michael Killen have tickled the lips of orangutans, lions, sheep, cows, cats, pigs, dogs, a rooster, a goldfish and other critters to help pitch products ranging from cheese to nuts to fast food.

Remember, "¡Yo quiero Taco Bell!"? Animal put the words in the chihuahua's mouth, tweaked his beseeching look and turned the campaign into one of *TV Guide*'s

top ten all time commercials. And, the happy cows in the popular California Cheese spots have been chewing on their sassy lines thanks to Animal's magic. So, when the Boston-based ad agency MMB needed to animate the mouths for a clowder of cats in a Meow Mix spot, it's no wonder they fetched Animal.

The small studio also handles compositing and visual effects for ad campaigns, but making creatures talk is Animal's claim to fame. "It's a challenge to do what we do and compete on a national scale, but we've found a niche," says Killen.



Jim Kreitzburg



Michael Killen

The Meow Mix commercial, staged to look like a cooking show, puts a chef in front of an audience of cats sitting on risers. Rather than applaud, the cats meow. "They all have to say the same thing at about the same time," says Kreitzburg, "but we varied the timing so that they weren't exactly in unison. It's something they'd do naturally, but not on cue." In the

wide shot, 32 cats meow their pleasure; in the close-up shot, we see 12 chorusing their approval.

The production crew shot seven cats on different levels, in various positions on a stair-step from one camera position and sent the footage to Animal. Animal sent the finished animations to Brickyard, a Boston-based effects studio; Brickyard

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Cause & Effect

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composited the cats into the final shot.

Unlike some studios that create talking animals, Animal uses what they call a "compositing style" of animation rather than 3D. "Most people who do talking parts model the animal's snout, texture map it, light it to match, track it in and animate the 3D element," says Kreitzburg. "I think that loses realism. It's too regular and precise."

Instead, Animal uses Autodesk Discreet's Flame system to layer in 2D elements. Each cat needed at least half a dozen elements; some required a dozen plus. "We manipulate the existing film without having to manufacture facial pieces," says Killen. "That's what's unique."

To help make sure they get the elements they need, Killen and Kreitzburg like to be involved in the production before the crew films the animals to specify what they'll need later. In addition, they take their own photographs of the animals.

"We try to get open mouth shots, the tongue and the teeth," says Kreitzburg. "One of us is on the shoot to make sure we get the elements we require." Sometimes they have the trainers open the animals' mouths to get footage. Other times, that's impossible.

"Last year, we did a campaign for Taco Bell with two large lions," says Killen. "No one was getting them to open their mouths. We had to work with what we got." But in all cases, they try to be unobtrusive.

The easiest animals to animate have been dogs trained to sit still. "They aren't throwing their tongues all over the place," says Kreitzburg. A rooster in the cheese commercials was the most difficult. "There are certain parts of the beak that we wanted to tweak to get more expression, but it looked faked, so we had to come up with other ways to create expression," he says.

Although the most obvious result of

Animal's work is the lip synch, the animators usually manipulate other parts of the animals' faces as well. In fact, in a Subway commercial, the animals the studio manipulated didn't say anything at all. In addition to making the Meow Mix cats meow on cue, they gave them



Less Is Mooore: Animal worked on the series of highly successful California Cheese commercials which feature talking cows.

wistful expressions by working with the cats' eyes.

"We are character animators," says Killen. "We aren't trying to show off fancy tools. We work hard to put expression into the animals." To do that, they might push an ear back or change the animal's eyes and overall expressions.

Occasionally, they'll incorporate minor

who is careful not to reveal the entire recipe for the studio's secret sauce.

One of their best secrets might be, however, the aesthetic decisions they make during the process. "We get involved in shot selection," Killen says. "A lot of times, if people haven't done much

animal work, they'll try to overdo it in the edit by including head bobs and eye turns. That works against what we do. We like to work with a straight palette."

Instead, Killen and Kreitzburg look for shots that make the critters look less like animals and more like humans. "There are certain tells that make animals look as brainless as they sometimes are," Killen says. "Like when a dog is panting. We try hard to keep away from shots that look non-intelligent."

And then, they animate with a subtle touch. "A lot of people over-exaggerate to create talking animals," says Kreitzburg. "We tend to pull ours back and make it look like a person is talking to give the animals more character and make them look more natural."

The studio's plan seems to be working. Despite their Pittsburgh location, during the past seven years, they've be-

"A lot of people over-exaggerate to create talking animals. We tend to pull ours back and make it look like a person in talking to give the animal more character and make them look natural."

—Jim Kreitzburg, co-founder of Pittsburgh's Animal vfx house

3D elements such as teeth, but most often such elements as the cats' tongues, mouths, eyes and ears are 2D. Once the animators have the 2D elements they need, they work in Flame to manipulate and layer them, creating the animation frame by frame. Working with the multiple layers helps them avoid the stretching that might happen if they were using a warp grid on only one layer. "That and mystery dust," says Killen,

come a go-to studio for talking animal animations, and that, it turns out, is not a bad long-term strategy.

"We'll be around forever," says Killen, who forgets all about our parrot friends as he notes, "Animals will never learn to talk on their own." ■

Barbara Robertson is an award-winning journalist who specializes in CG animation and visual effects. She can be reached at edit@animationmagazine.net.

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Digital Magic

The art of finding subversive animation in unexpected places

One of the paradoxes of animation is that its very artificiality makes it a much more powerful tool than live action to depict, or comment upon, things in the real world. Edgy animation is the cultural equivalent of hiding in plain sight. The way to keep the culture police from sniffing around your yard is to do what artists did under the boot of the KGB—use irony, imagery and simile, and it's bound to throw the coppers off the trail because they won't get it.

Such is the case with the non-commercial work of Portland, Oregon-based designer/

animation, miniature effects, underwater footage, time-lapse photography and footage of protests and street riots. "I knew I didn't want the video to literally be about the Kelly case," says White. Yorke agreed.

For one of the video's central metaphors, an eagle flying overhead, White enlisted the aid of fellow filmmaker David Russo to animate the sequences. Russo's highly stylized, fast-paced animations give the video much of its energy. "David does this amazing work," says White. "It's unapologetically structuralist, in terms of seeing what's being done. You see

the hands and body of the animator in the frame, and yet it's very enigmatic. You think you know what's going on and how he does it, but in fact you're not sure."

Another key innovation was a unique type of visual effect developed in-house at Bent, helmed by director Jim Clark. White and his colleagues call the process Smallgantics. In this case, Clark took aerial

footage of landscapes and cityscapes, and through a labor-intensive process of rotoscoping and hand matting, created what White describes as "fake miniatures." It's a process that adjusts the depth of field in such a way as to trick the eye into perceiving the image as an intricately detailed miniature set. Hence, details such as moving cars on a highway, telephone poles, steam coming from a chimney or people in the streets, take on the look and feel of the smallest model train set in the world. "The detail appears unfathomable," says White, "because it is, in fact, the real thing." (Their work can be seen at bentimagelab.com.)

Worming Up to Visa

Hitting a mark with consumers these days, any mark, is a big challenge for advertisers. Especially on television, where personal video recorders can zap commercials out of existence. So ad execs who used to chatter about "cutting through the clutter" (and then produce a car ad that looked like the previous

500 car ads) are taking more chances with painters, sculptors, cartoonists and others of their ilk. While it may be another depressing case of corporate America taking cool art and selling it back to us as pop culture, at least it's full employment for artists rather than for goateed business grads with illusions of Michael Bay's career dancing in their heads. A recent example is the use of visual artist Pat Smith for Visa's recently launched *Life Takes Visa* campaign. The last time the company reinvented its brand identity was twenty years ago. So it's a bit of a risk that they launched it with a pencil-drawn, break-dancing worm.

Smith attended the University of Massachusetts, Amherst for painting, and got into animation right after college. He moved to New York City and worked at just about every animation studio in town, trying to teach himself as much as possible. "My first big gig was directing a show called *Downtown* for MTV," Smith recalls. "After that I directed the last several seasons of *Daria*. Then I began to make independent animated short films, which got me into doing commercials. And here we are, animating dancing worms." Among the influences Smith cites are Disney artists Milt Kahl, Frank



Pat Smith

Thomas and Ollie Johnston; Jamie Hewlett, the creator of *Tank Girl*; and Dutch animator Hisko Hulsing. His animated characters are also the stars of two very distinctive ads for Zoloft happy pills. His new animated film, *Puppet*, premiered at the Tribeca International Film Festival in early May. ■

Chris Grove is a Los Angeles-based journalist and actor. If you have any hot tips for Chris, he can be reached at edit@animationmagazine.net.



by Chris Grove



Harrowed

director Chel White of Bent Image Lab. Though I've only talked to him once, White seems to have dialed in a near perfect worklife for himself. He makes money with commercials and uses the proceeds to create, among other things, edgy short films and music videos. And he gets to do that without having to rent a live/work space in North Hollywood. Downtown Portland trumps Lankershim Boulevard any day.

White was recently recruited by Thom Yorke (of Radiohead) to direct a music video for *Harrowdown Hill*, one of the tracks off Yorke's acclaimed solo album *The Eraser*. The song is about the apparent suicide of British weapons inspector Dr. David Kelly, who killed himself shortly after the publication of his report debunking British Prime Minister Tony Blair's pre-Iraq war weapons-of-mass-destruction argument. Yorke, a self-described political activist, says *Harrowdown Hill* (where Kelly's body was found) is "the angriest song I've ever written in my life."

The resulting video combines experimental

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Tech Reviews

Andersson Technologies' SynthEyes 2007

Big things, oftentimes, come in small packages. A strand of DNA, the nanopod and the fruity goodness of a Starburst fruit chew! SynthEyes, Andersson Technologies' 3D tracking program, also falls into this category. This tool has been around for a while, running quietly under the radar of most larger FX houses, often shadowed by its behemoth cousin, Boujou.

In the past 20 years, tracking has become an integral part of the visual effects pipeline. It used to be that you had proprietary software or very unique, expensive software to analyze markers and extract a 3D camera. Either that, or you used motion-control systems that occasionally could provide accurate data to recreate the camera move in the computer.

The first thing you need in tracking a 3D camera is a camera that is moving in a 3D environment. The next are points that can be tracked—these could be actual markers that the vfx supervisor placed on set, and God willing, someone

surveyed the points. But, they could also be corners of a building, smudges on the wall, cracks in the sidewalk, etc. Most of the shows that I've worked on have the latter kind of track markers—which could be called the “no plan” plan of visual effects supervision. However, high-end trackers have what we call a ‘shotgun’ approach, which means that it analyzes the frame and finds points of high contrast and then moves to the next frame and compares until the sequence is completely analyzed. It is akin to throwing paint on the wall and hoping that what sticks will look like a Jackson Pollock. It's loose, rough and rather crude—but it works for the most part and it used to be restricted to the expensive trackers. But as of a few iterations ago, SynthEyes added this new feature to its many existing ones, making it a viable competitor to the industry standards. This is all in addition to having an already sophisticated manual tracking system, where you choose your points to track.

SynthEyes has a wide variety of tracking, analysis and correction tools to give you what you need to solve most problems. You can track forward or backward.

by Todd
Sheridan
Perry

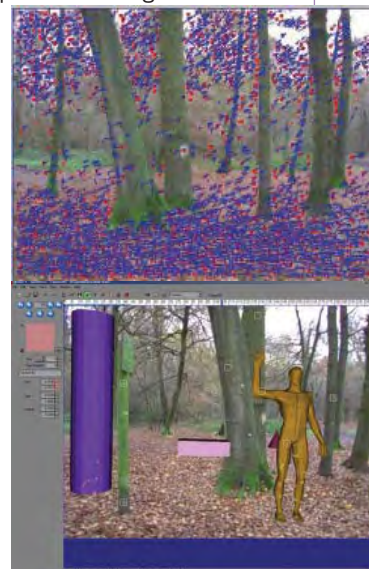


There is a small window for watching your tracked pattern in macro so you can see how much the tracker is shifting—or when it loses its pattern. Graph editors show the x and y position change as well as the velocity change and the amount of 3D error between your tracked pattern and a solved point in 3D space. There are tools for analyzing and correcting lens distortion. The lens focal length can be manually keyframed if the camera operator incorporated a zoom into the shot—or you can tell SynthEyes that you don't know the lens size, but you know that it zoomed.

And the tracking is just the start of the fun! Once you have a scene tracked, you can locate light sources, refine the track using other cameras, including still cameras, that may have shot the scene from other angles. You can put in flex splines (these are splines tracked into 3D space which represent objects like windows you need to mask out as an alien climbs through them). Oh, the joys of 3D tracking! Keep in mind that you are no longer exempt from what previously was a pastime of the elite classes who had access to a \$10,000 license. This tracking tool can be yours for \$399, no kidding! And by the way, if you are a fan of this summer's mega-hit *Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest*, you might like to know that Asylum Visual Effects used SynthEyes for 30 to 40 shots in the mill wheel sequence.

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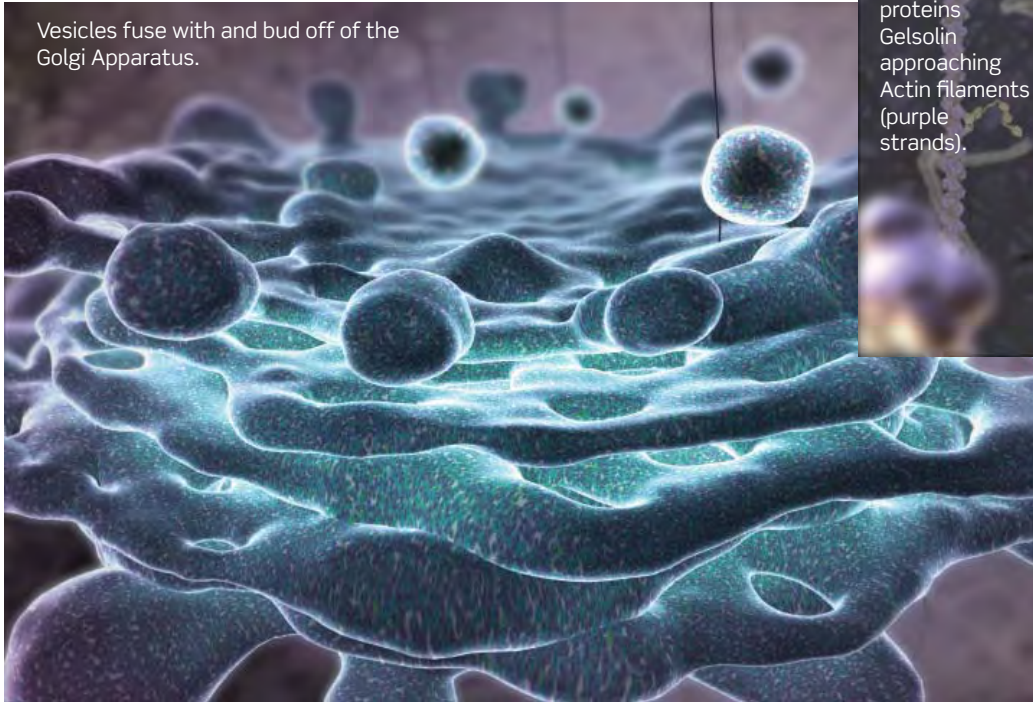
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rate animation that flowed smoothly—not unlike NASA's imagined 'flights' over distant planets. As Lue explains, "We want students to *feel* a sense of the environment when we dive into the cell. We were concerned about cinematic impact."

Lue also wanted *Cell* to avoid being either overly-simplified or a high-end simulation. "Both extremes fail in terms of education," he asserts. Given the dense 'machinery' packed within a cell, it would be impractical to visualize everything. As Lue admits, "Modeling what's *really* going on in the background would drive anyone insane!"

The Harvard profs worked back and

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Sleeper Cell

A CG-animated scientific project becomes a hit at SIGGRAPH and will be used as a teaching tool at Harvard.

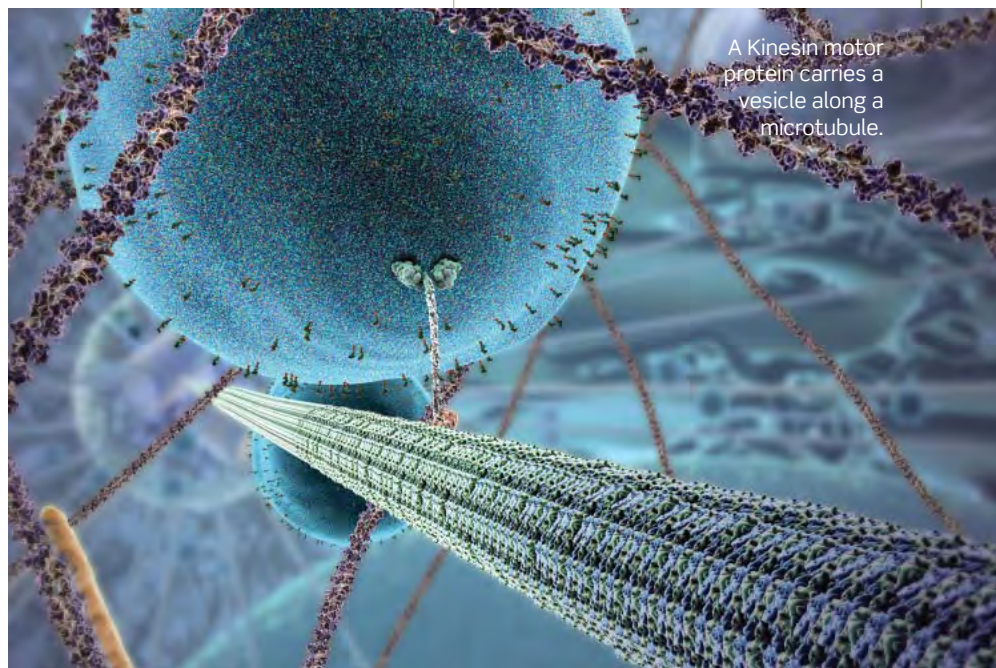
by Ellen Wolff

Movie mogul Howard Hughes couldn't have predicted this irony, but his namesake medical foundation financed a 3D science animation that played alongside Hollywood's best CGI at SIGGRAPH 2006's Electronic Theater last month. A 'microscopic' journey into *The Inner Life of the Cell* was funded with a grant to Dr. Robert Lue by the Howard Hughes Medical Institute. *Cell* was originally conceived to educate biology undergraduates at Harvard, where Lue directs Life Sciences Education.

To create the eight-minute piece, Lue and colleague Dr. Alain Viel chose Connecticut-based XVIVO, which typically produces scientific animation for corporations. But *Cell* was a challenge of another order, because Lue and Viel had a mini-epic in mind.

"Rob Lue has a very cinematic mind," observes production director Mike As-

trachan. So XVIVO's challenge was to turn pages of scientific data into accu-



A Kinesin motor protein carries a vesicle along a microtubule.



"Working on Star Wars: Episode II
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Opportunities

continued from page 66

forth with XVIVO to determine which elements were essential. "I would imagine that Pixar and DreamWorks face that with their films," laughs Lue. "How many trees are in the background? If there's a breeze blowing, how much motion is there? Are there wildebeasts too?"

XVIVO medical director David Bolinsky adds, "We had to see the panorama within the cell without having the 'forest' block the 'trees.'" For lead animator John Liebler, *Cell* presented the most complex challenge of his seven-year career in medical animation. "There were so many levels of complexity that at some point we said, 'All right, we're

going to show *this* level of detail, but we're not going past that. We tried to stay consistent with a certain 'level of magnification,' if you will. Initially, I would look at something and say, 'We can't do that.' Then I'd start playing with it and think, 'But it would be really cool if we DID that.'"

Liebler, who works in NewTek's Lightwave 3D, recalls, "The easiest way for me to understand this was to start building 3D objects and see how they fit together. I wasn't doing drawings first and then trying to make them in 3D. I was building objects so I could understand complicated science with my artist's brain."

To maximize accuracy, XVIVO culled xyz information and point cloud data from a scientific database called the Protein Data Bank. Liebler credits Sean Hyde-Moyer's free PDB Reader plug-in with helping him bring data into Lightwave's modeler. He also praises a Lightwave plug-in from Happy Digital called HD Instance. "It allowed me to make thousands of copies of a polygonal object in a scene. Each could be represented in the software as either a point or a single polygon, and be animated without taking up memory. Then at render time, objects became several-hundred-polygon models. I could work very interactively, yet render thousands of things."

XVIVO's artists also used Adobe After Effects, and except for instructions to color-code certain objects, the Harvard profs granted creative license with the music, color and lighting. Bolinsky observes, "The structures you're seeing are smaller than the wavelengths of light that describe color. That created a free-for-all in terms of our palette. We'd ask, 'How would this look if it was something you *could* see in natural light?'"

Such decisions often rested on what worked best for the composition of a scene. XVIVO's choices hit the mark more often than not, recalls Astrachan. "Even with the great deal of information that they'd given us, we were able to handle things pretty much on the first pass."

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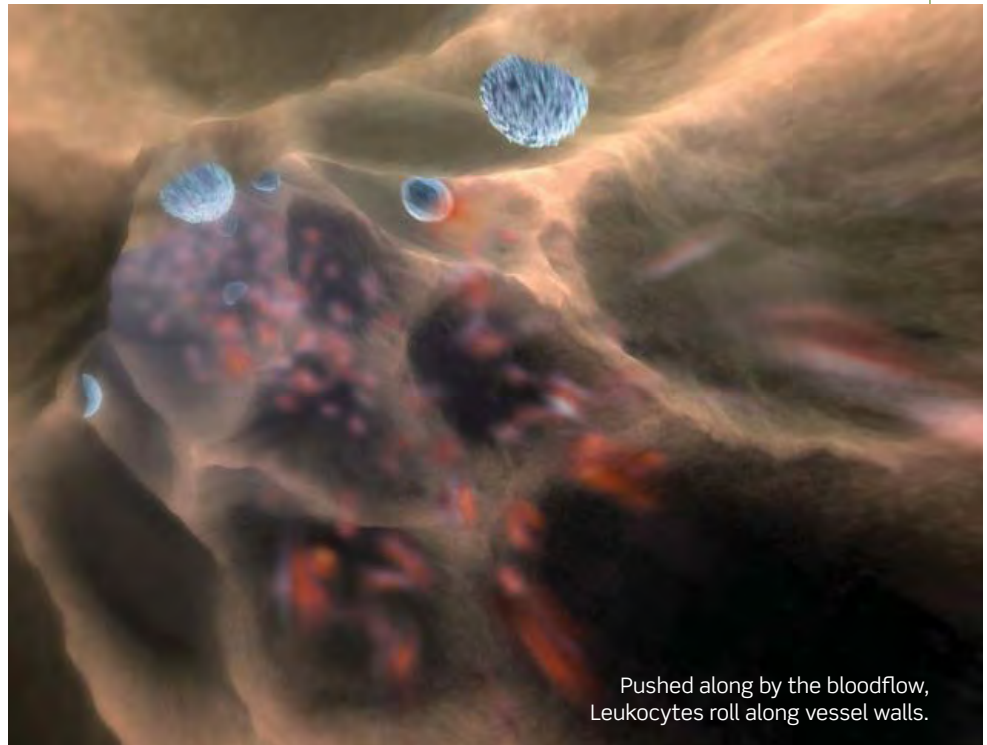
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Cell was a coup, the ultimate test was whether it helped Harvard students learn biology. Lue's research indicates that compared to textbook studies alone, animation can boost comprehension by 30 percent.

The Inner Life Of the Cell will be released as a multi-language DVD, and even for iPods. Lue envisions future 3D animations joining the project in an integrated computer-learning system called Biovisions, which also includes streaming video and Flash animation. His grant from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute was just renewed for another four years, so he's not just dreaming.

Lue, who previously authored a CD-ROM on HIV-AIDs, has long anticipated these media developments. Yet he admits, "Trying to represent living processes has always been a serious challenge. But even at the birth of cell biology there was art—in the form of exquisite drawings of what people saw ... or *thought* they saw." Using the latest animation techniques, Lue believes,



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You can view *The Inner Life of the Cell* at www.xvivo.net.

Ellen Wolff is a Los Angeles-based journalist who specializes in education, CG animation and visual effects.

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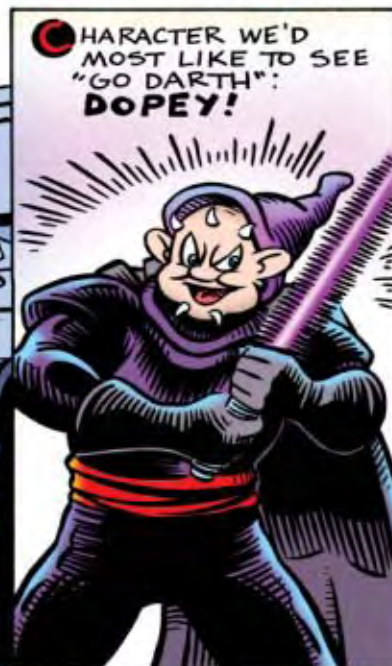
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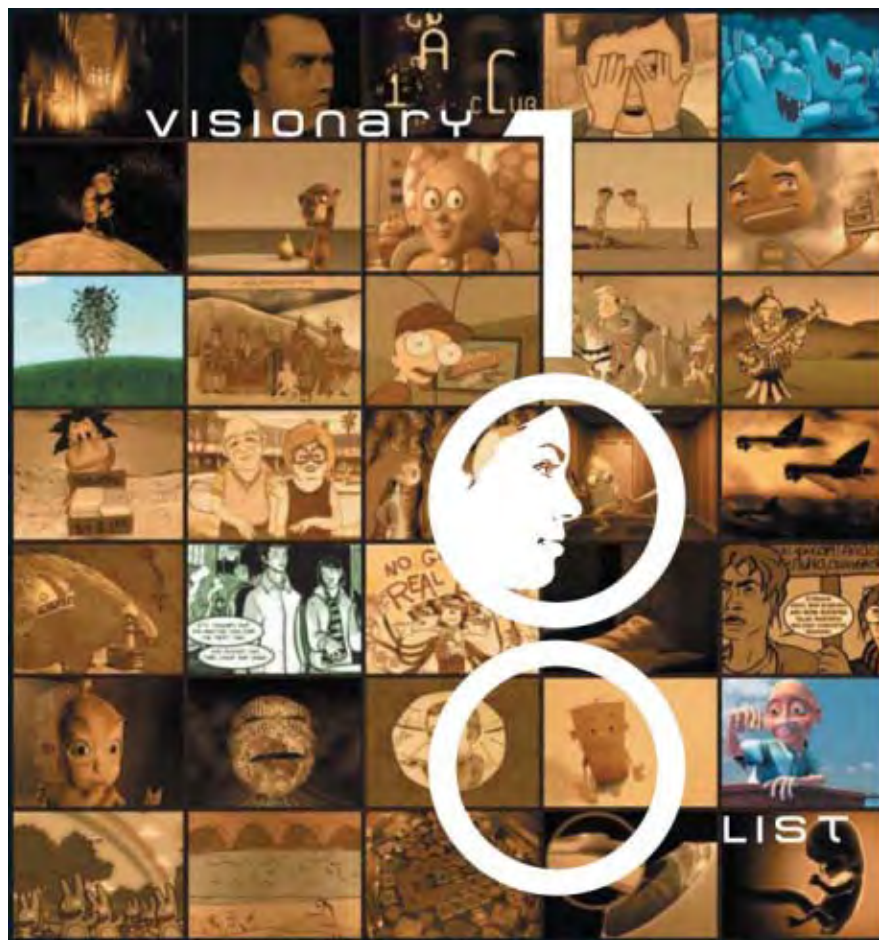
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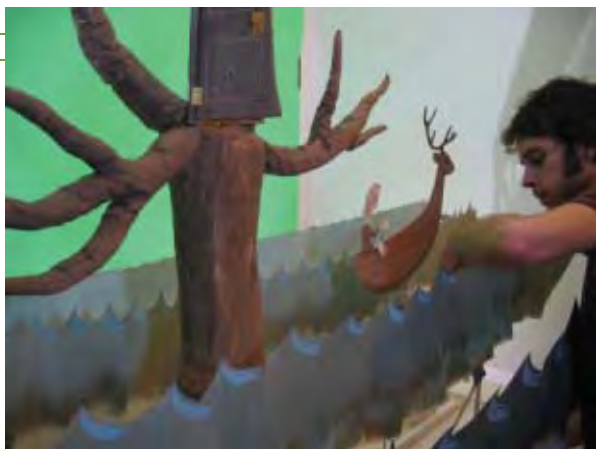
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A Stop-Motion Start

San Francisco's Academy of Art University's flourishing stop-mo program is just the hands-on ticket for aspiring animation students. **by Sherrie Sinclair**

It certainly seems like there's been a stop-motion renaissance over the past few years. At the 2005 Academy Awards the stop-motion labors of love *Wallace & Gromit—The Curse of the Were-Rabbit* and *Tim Burton's Corpse Bride* were two of the three films vying for Best Animated Feature Oscar. Nick Park's man and dog clay classic ended up taking home the golden statue, and lately there's been a growing interest in the world of stop mo among new students diving into the animation pool. Now, more and more aspiring stop-motion cartoon heads are flocking to The School of Animation and Visual Effects at San Francisco's Academy of Art University (AAU) for its growing Stop Motion Animation program in addition to its strong 2D, 3D and visual effects programs.

AAU's animation students begin their first semester with the Experimental Animation curriculum, which allows them to start understanding and practicing the principles of animation, movement, timing, storytelling and filmmaking. Using a downshooter camera setup, students manipulate sand, food and paper cutouts as well as clay media on a flat lightbox. They also learn drawing on film and pixilation techniques. In addition to several on-campus sections of the class, this beginning class is offered online through Academy of Art University's Cybercampus.

The Experimental Animation sequence provides freshmen with an immediate immersion in the animation and filmmaking process. Foundation drawing classes build drawing skills, and introductory computer classes prepare them for any CG coursework. In Experimental Animation 2, students can explore other stop-motion techniques besides puppetry and delve into the more avant garde aspects of experimental stop-motion filmmaking.

Puppet Making for Stop Motion is the next in a series of stop-motion skill building classes, which introduce students to techniques from wire frame to ball-and-socket joints, latex moldmaking and sculpting for creating stop-motion puppets. Other courses include set design and fabrication, 2D techniques and storyboarding, so students understand film planning and camera usage for their sets while continuing to strengthen their animation skills.

Students have found that AAU's stop-motion curriculum has helped them develop a better understanding of the dynamics of animation in general. "The MFA Stop Motion class at the Academy really changed the way I approached animating anything," notes Natalie Ryness, an AAU Stop Motion Award Winner and graduate student. "I would always approach a scene with this

doing a scene. Stop motion was a great place to learn that because the pay off is so quick."

AAU has an accomplished and diverse faculty helping the stop-motion program with working professionals also on hand part time to teach the students and shed light on current industry trends. Faculty member Cora Craig, who has worked on seven Academy Award-winning films and four Cleo-winning commercials, was instrumental in starting AAU's stop-motion program several years ago. Past students have praised Craig for the receptive environment she fosters in the classroom. "She gave enthusiastic encouragement to try out everything to make a project come together," Craig's former student Alistair Hamilton says. "I think she learned just as much from us as we did from her... If someone found a great way to accomplish

"The puppet looking down at something, scratching its mouth ... made me see how organic and fun animation could be if I allowed myself to be flexible."

—Natalie Ryness, award-winning graduate of Academy of Art University

idea of what the character was supposed to do, and then I'd spend a lot of time making that idea happen," she says.


However, Natalie often found herself wanting to tweak the movements she had planned for her characters once she actually had them on stage and in front of the camera. "The puppet looking down at something, scratching its mouth, taking a minute to think before it acted—it made me see how organic and fun animation could be if I allowed myself to be flexible and notice what the puppet was actually doing rather than what I thought it should be doing," she says. "It is kind of like really listening to another actor when you are

something, be it a way to keep an armature from flopping around or what mixture of random ingredients would make the best slime, she was just as interested as any of us. It felt as though she was on the journey with us rather than trying to herd us down some well-beaten path." ■

For more information about Academy of Art's Stop-Motion program, visit: www.academyart.edu.

Sherrie H. Sinclair is a graduate of FSU and Academy of Art University. She has worked as an animator at Disney Feature Animation and is currently co-director of the School of Animation and Visual Effects at AAU in San Francisco.

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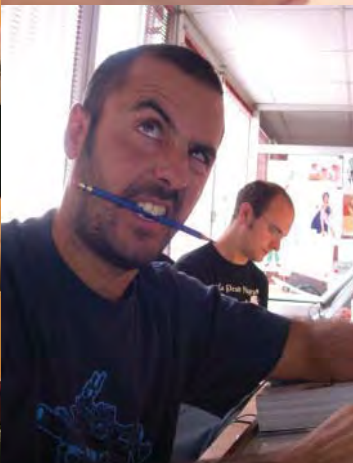
9:15 a.m.: Morning choices are the same all over the world: Sugar or saccharine—hot chocolate or pure caffeine.



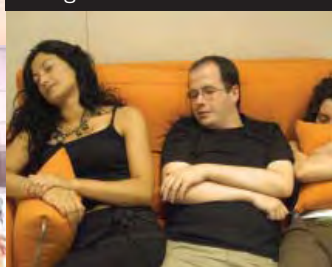
2: 15 p.m.: We get to pick salad or steak. Red meat unleashed the savage beast in our men.



10:21 a.m.: Our animators practice their fantastic facial expressions on each other all day.



11:46 a.m.: She prefers the red pencil, but he's crazy about blue.



4:47 p.m.: We take our afternoon siesta time very seriously.



5:17 p.m.: Our daily script-fighting cardio workout.



6:30 p.m.: It's not peace, but truce...until tomorrow!



10:30 a.m.: Some read the paper to keep up with current events...well, they try anyway.



11: 22 p.m.: A quiet studio, finally. Doesn't anyone have a life outside the studio?

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